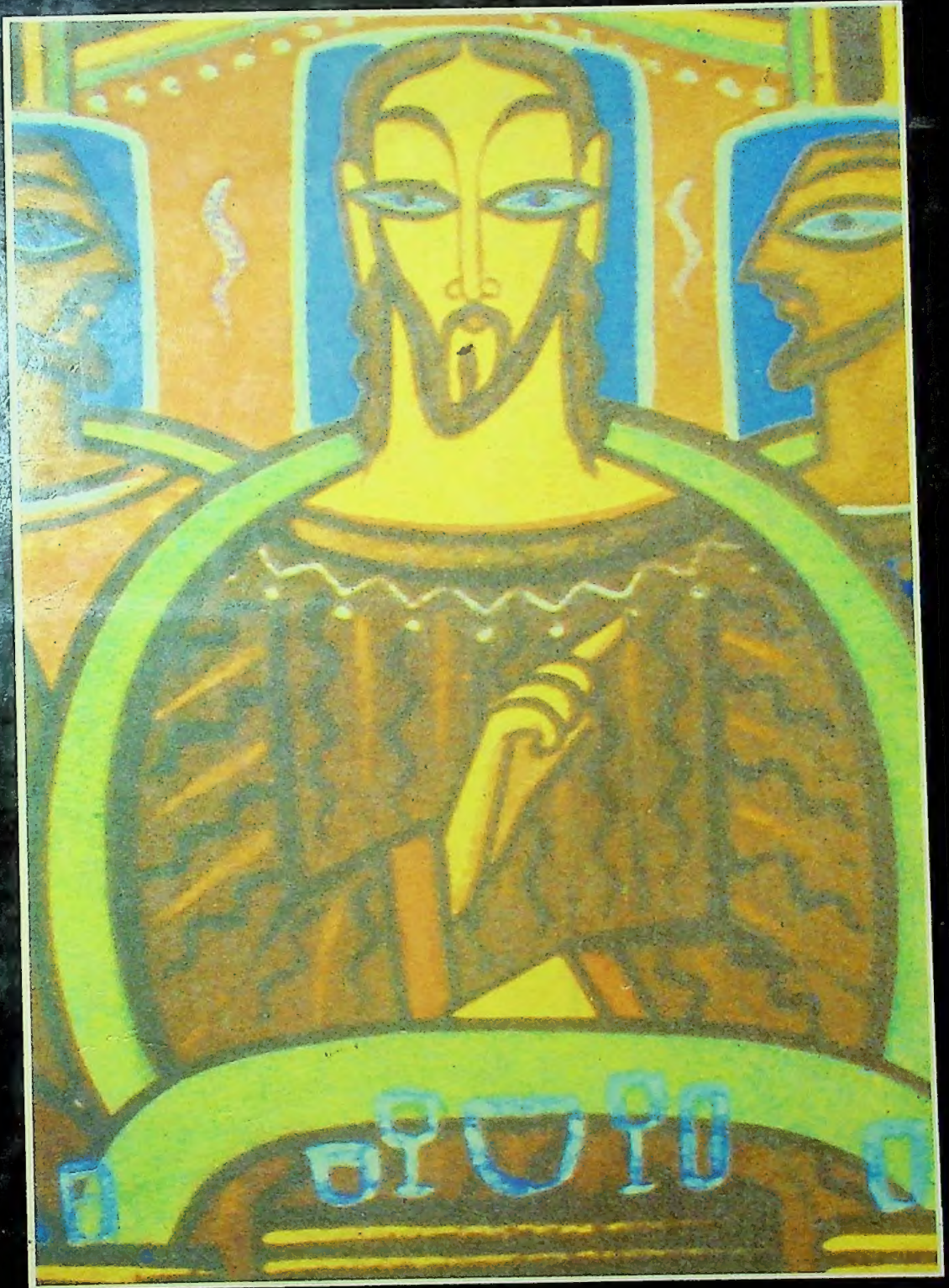


# CHRISTIAN PAINTING IN INDIA



MATTHEW LEDERLE, S.J.



# **CHRISTIAN PAINTING IN INDIA THROUGH THE CENTURIES**

**By Matthew Lederle, S.J.,**

**Rs. 100.00, \$ 25.00, DM 50.00**

## **ABOUT THIS BOOK.....**

"In the three lectures which Fr. Lederle gave at the Heras Institute, and which are here published, a broad perspective is offered concerning the relevance of this kind of art for the Church in India today. In earlier essays on this subject, by Taylor, Lehmann, Butler, Hoefer and Nicolas, we do not find the same wide concern to situate the work of artists representing the image of Jesus, in the emerging Church of India. Thus sections like "Christian Art in Ancient Kerala" and "Golden Goa" are valuable in that they fill out the broad canvas of an historically evolving Indian Christian ecclesiology.

*(Continued on inside back cover)*

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THROUGH THE CENTURIES**





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Specially thanked for permission to reproduce are: M.F. Husain for "Mother Theresa", K.K. Hebbar (courtesy: B. Kotak, owner) for "Sacrifice", Badri Narayan for "Sinful Woman" and "Adam and Eve", Jamini Roy, S. Gujral, Arup Das, Kanwal Krishna, Laxman Pai, F.N. Souza, and S. Chauda for photographs taken from the book by Arno Lehman.

The sudden death of the author in the course of the publication of this work made it necessary for the publishers to seek the assistance of Naomi Wray to identify the pictures correctly and to ensure that the necessary permissions had been obtained. She has done this work with loving care, but with possible mistakes due to the lack of information at her disposal. Both she and the publishers offer their apologies for any errors and involuntary infringements of copyright.

Priya Correia-Afonso was responsible for the layout and organization of the plates. To her, to Naomi Wray, Art India (Pune) and Snehasadan (Pune) the publishers are grateful for all their cooperation and support in the production of this volume.



## FOREWORD

The sad demise of Fr. Matthew Lederle has made it difficult for us to find anyone to replace him. The task remains for us to try and evaluate the role he took in encouraging and stimulating Indian Christian art. We trust that what he initiated will not come to a standstill for lack of someone with his vision, to help continue where he left off. It is my hope that the Lord who called Fr. Lederle to this ministry will call others to continue the good work he began.

In Indian art and aesthetics it is not only the artist who gives form and content to a culture, but also the "sagridaya", "the person of one heart", who knows how to share, to appreciate, and also to criticise, because of an inner vision. It is said that the Abbot Sugar of St. Denis in France did much to "create" Gothic art, through his deep understanding of a mysticism of light, and his vision of how Christian art should celebrate the mystery of light. This abbot was not an artist himself, though he was a patron of the arts. In the same way, there is much truth in the statement that Catholic art in India has been deeply influenced by the personal vision of Fr. Lederle. Further, what Fr. Lederle had to offer to the Church in India was his own personal appreciation and understanding of the work of Angelo da Fonseca.

The influence of Angelo on other Catholic artists owes much I believe to the way in which Fr. Lederle interpreted Angelo's work to the thinking Church. If one looks carefully, one notices that both Sr. Genevieve and Sr. Claire have been influenced by Angelo in their use of line, and even in the treatment of subject matter. For example, Angelo's treatment of Mary in the light of India's ideal of womanhood, and his treatment of the suffering of Jesus and the devotion of the disciples, lay the foundations for a Catholic Indian spirituality from which a visual tradition of images has arisen.

The guiding force behind this mainstream of what "Art India" has come to stand for is obviously the enthusiasm and aesthetic judgement of Fr. Lederle. He never obtruded; he always seemed to be in the background. Even when getting others to write about Indian Christian art, he did not force his opinions on others, but communicated his enthusiasm, and in doing so contributed more than anyone else to develop a taste for this new kind of art in the Church.

The fact remains that Fr. Lederle did have a developed artistic taste. This may have come from his own artistic formation as a child. While visiting his brother's home in Nuremberg, Fr. Lederle pointed out to me some pictures painted by the art teacher in the school he attended and which the family had acquired and treasured. Among his notes I found papers on art appreciation, and his own careful observations on various schools of art in the West. On German art he comments:

"not so much the beautiful man, but

- (1) expression (of character, individuality)
- (2) fulness (surpassing any limitation of form, always in search of a new body)
- (3) interiority and spiritualization: leaning more towards mysticism than towards intellectualism

The inner depth: the essence should determine the form, the object should be illumined by the inner mystery of the soul."

These are notes written in his own hand. They help us, I think, to understand better what Fr. Lederle was looking for in a picture.

But in addition to his understanding of western aesthetics, he had also a deep appreciation of Indian cultural values, and the great heritage of Indian tradition. It was probably his study of new Hindu movements, and his strong sense of history, which brought him to a clear estimation of the importance of culture for the Indian Church.

Fr. Lederle was very deeply committed to the Church in India, and it is essentially as a Churchman that he came to art. His concern for art evolved out of his understanding of Mission. Among his papers there are a number of carefully prepared notes on the relation of art to the life of the Church, especially Liturgy. Inasmuch as he was given the authority to commission artists for the Church, we find him always on the lookout for talent, especially local talent. He wanted to encourage local people, both within the Church and outside it, to work for the Church. Thus, not long before he died, he was writing enthusiastically from Ahmedabad about a Hindu artist whose work he had found in some churches, and who, he thought, should be encouraged. The same concern made him, as a religious superior, want to give opportunities to young scholastics, or any other persons in the Church, who seemed to need encouragement to develop creative potentialities.

Fr. Lederle was very much concerned about the relation or response of the simple churchgoer to works of art in the Church. He realized that there often exists a great gulf of understanding between the artist or even educated Christian, and the simple Christian who does not know much about art. He stressed the importance of *clarity*. Just as in Liturgy, article 21 of the Vatican II





Kerala Cross



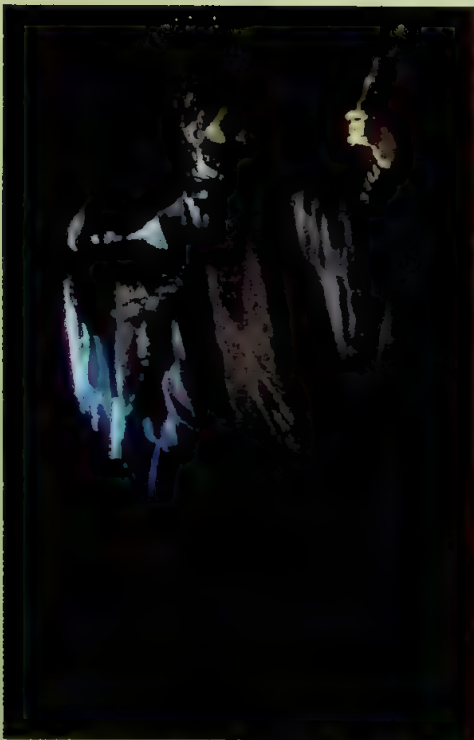
Kerala Church



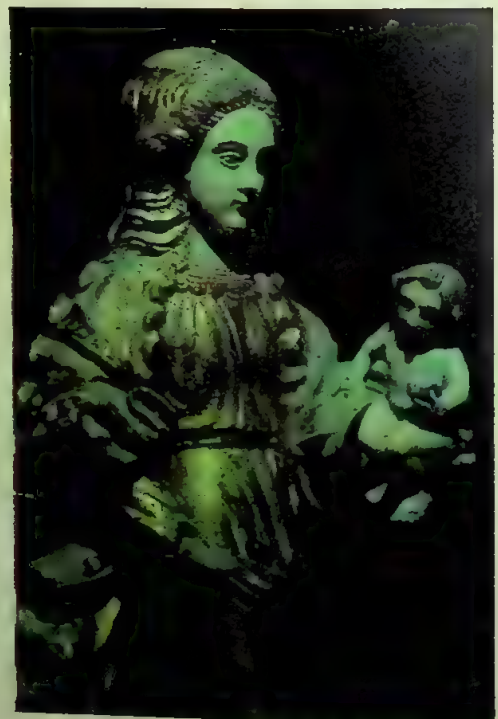
The Name of Jesus. *Velha Goa*



The Crucifixion. *Goa 18th C.*



St. Francis Xavier. *Velha Goa*

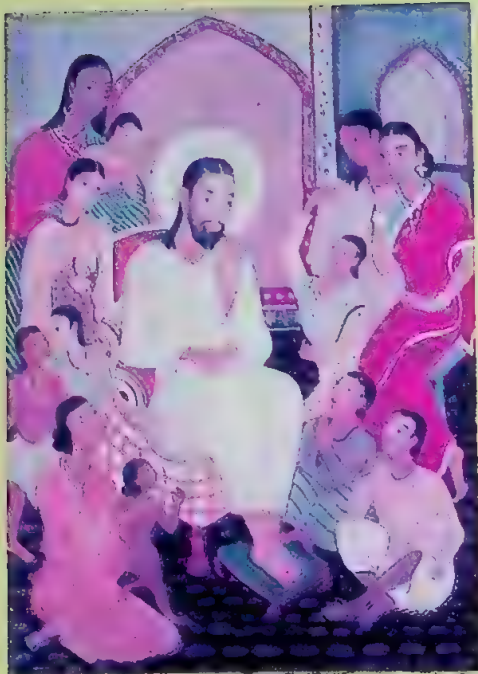


Mother and Child. *Damao 18th C.*





Altar of Cathedral.



Christ the Teacher.

C. Mhatre



Batik of Christ.

P. Solomon Raj



Sinful Woman.

Badri Narayan





Conversion of St. Catherine      *Goa Cathedral*



Alfonso De Albuquerque *Goa Gallery*



Adoration of the Shepherds

*St. Paul's, Diu*



Madonna and Child.

*Mughal Miniature*





Madonna and Child with Jesuit Missionary. *Mughal Miniature*



Mother and Child.

Jamini Roy



Constitution states that signs should "express more clearly the holy things which they signify...", Fr. Lederle held that this should apply to Christian art too, for "surely artists will want to work for this same goal of clarity."

In the same paper on the relation of art to liturgy we read: "The dominant sign of sacred art is the sign of the presence of Christ", but, "it is the presence of Christ in the people of God which is the primary reality, the primary presence. This presence reaches its deepest actualization when the local church is gathered to hear the Word of God, when the local church is gathered to offer and eat the body of Christ. It is this deep and primary reality that he must portray."<sup>6</sup>

One is struck by how deeply Fr. Lederle had committed himself to a post-Vatican II Council understanding of the Church in the world. It is this concern for the Indian Church, lived in humble local parishes, that also drew Fr. Lederle to reflect deeply on the role of *ashrams* in the Church. Fr. Lederle's concern with Indian Christian art must be seen within the context of his interest in the inculturation of the Church generally. This also led to his involvement in the Christian ashram movement. For him the important point about ashrams was not so much the Guru, or the search for the Absolute, but a deep and meaningful dialogue, with people of other Faiths, particularly Hindus in the Indian context. He liked to make his retreat living with people of other Faiths. Once he made his retreat at the nature-cure ashram of Vinoba Bhawe's brother, not far from Poona. Another time, he went to Shantiniketan. For his "Dialogue" was not just on the verbal level; it was something to be lived in community. In that sense, visual art was for him also a means towards dialogue.

His concern for community emerges over and over again. Thus for him: "It is most important that the needs of a Christian community be served... the communal activity of the Church calls for a communal art. The Church must be a true image of the fundamentally poor community which it houses, and the merciful saving God which that community worships." As a result Fr. Lederle is not only against ostentation and triumphalism in Church architecture and decoration, but is also troubled by the fact that often art does not appeal to the ordinary taste of the community; it may even shock and provoke the community. Fr. Lederle tended to be cautious, though he was always anxious to experiment and try to draw the best out of the community. "The Church reminds her artists that they cannot be mere innovators. They have to realize that they are continuing a tradition, are part of a continuity... There is a definite culture involved in sacred art which the artist must not only accept but also

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<sup>6</sup> These notes have been taken from the personal papers of Fr. Lederle given to me by Fr. Pramod Raikar of Snehasadan, Poona. There is no indication of the authorship of these papers. However, as Fr. Lederle's handwriting is found in the corrections, I assume that even if the writing is not strictly his, at least the sentiments expressed would have been approved by him.

assimilate, so that it becomes part of his being. The fidelity we owe to the forms of the past demands that we take the art of the past, like the saints of the past, as our models."

The question does remain: how much is this "church art" in fact "domesticated art"? How much should the artist, in the service of the Church, be subservient to community needs, as perceived by those in authority? Fr. Lederle was conscious of the fact that increasingly artists find it difficult to work for Church patronage, because of a feeling that this patronage can often be stifling and limiting. Fr. Lederle discusses the "freedom" of the artist in the last section of the Heras lectures under the heading "Christian Painting in India today". He writes "In our times, as far as the West is concerned, many of the cultural expressions did not originate from religious sources; this made it still more difficult to relate the new cultural expressions to the great mass of religious people, or to introduce them into places of worship. This resulted in a deep division between many new creative forms of art growing out of the free impulse of artists, and religious paintings springing out of devotion, insight, and the service of the faithful." How far should the artist be free of all social responsibility, and how much does this freedom cost in terms of whether the artist can contribute to the creative growth of the community in which he or she lives? I feel that Fr. Lederle's approach to art was very much within the framework of an Indian understanding of the artist as rooted within a traditional symbol system, and using a personal talent for the service of the whole community, not just for individual self-expression. The "Church" was, for Fr. Lederle, *the community*, and so Christian art should be placed at the service of the Church.

This does not mean, however, that Fr. Lederle was only concerned with Church interests. Because the Church was, for him, not just the institution but the community of believers, he was very interested in the problem of "non-baptized believers in Jesus". For him the Church community really spread far beyond what we generally mean by the Church, to include the community of all those believing in Jesus, whether they belong to an institutional church or not. He was very keen that films on the life of Jesus be made, so that more people in India could know about the life of Christ, as he felt that films were the most popular media. He wanted to reach out to as many people as possible. That is also why he wanted to publish, to use the media as far as possible. Perhaps one of the most important contributions which Fr. Lederle made towards a realistic understanding of Indian Christian art was to appreciate what non-Christians had contributed to this field, and recognize that the "image of Jesus" had now become part of the heritage of India and not just the possession of the Christian community. It is true, however, that for Fr. Lederle Christian art very clearly meant the representation of the image of Jesus. He would



often remark that for him one of the best pictures of Angelo da Fonseca was the face of Jesus, which is framed and hangs at the entrance of Snehasadan in Pune, an inter-cultural dialogue centre of which Fr. Lederle was one of the main founders. Fr. Lederle claimed that this face of Jesus had the power to attract people as to a person.

It was in this connection that Fr. Lederle had also a great interest in the shroud of Turin. He discusses this shroud image of Jesus even in the Heras lectures, in the section "Christian Painting in India today", where he seems to try and bring together his ideas about the future of Christian art. There he remarks, "Since the 12th century, through the influence of the order of St. Francis of Assisi, the human Christ, the innocence of the child and the agony of the Passion came to the foreground in viewing Christ." This remark is important in that it indicates a certain preference for a gentle humanism in Fr. Lederle himself. A certain Franciscan ideal was very important to him, as he saw that this ideal made a great deal of sense in the context of the Indian Renaissance, initiated by great humanists like Lokmanya Tilak, Gandhiji, and Tagore. In fact, Fr. Lederle himself translated the "Little Flowers" into Marathi, and asked me to illustrate the book with some little drawings. Fr. Lederle often mentioned that he felt Christian art should be "devotional" and that we should learn from the great "devotional" tradition of Indian spiritual culture. There again, the fact that he had personally immersed himself in the Bhakti tradition, which also flowered in Maharashtra under the inspiration of great poets like Tukaram, influenced his understanding of the direction in which Christian art should go. Just about two weeks before his sudden death, we spent some days together attending a meeting of the Indian Christian Art Association in Bombay, and there again he brought up this question of the face of Jesus in the shroud image. He felt that Indian Christian artists should draw inspiration from this face, and he asked me whether I had tried to model my image of the face of Jesus on this prototype.

Fr. Lederle was essentially a pragmatic person whose approach to problems was practical, rather than abstract and theoretical. That is why, in concerning himself with Christian art, he was engaged with the actual problem of getting Indian Christians to use paintings more, was also worried about how Christian artists should make a livelihood. That is why he tended to think that the problem of Christian art was a problem of *patronage*. In a very revealing essay which he once wrote, entitled "Christian painting in Indian Style: Experiences of a Publisher" he puts down in a very candid way his reflections after years of running "Art India". This organization, which was certainly the most important contribution which he made to the development of Christian art in India, is a thriving concern for printing paintings done by Indian Christian artists. Fr. Lederle did not see this as a "business", but rather as a "service."

He wanted to print pictures which those Christians could use who could not, perhaps, afford an original painting. He also saw "Art India" as working slowly towards a change of taste in the Indian Christian community. In the late 50's, when Fr. Raymond Keel actually began "Art India", it was characterized by an overwhelming preference for foreign, rather sweet representations of Jesus, in the Italian, or Spanish Rococco tradition. That was what Indian Christians had been brought up to like, and anything "Indian" was looked upon with suspicion. Fr. Lederle speaks of a well-known gentleman of Pune, who said, "For my acquaintances in India, I send foreign cards. For my friends abroad I send Indian cards."

Fr. Lederle admits that the fact that Art India was started by a priest, and was run not by a lay person but by volunteers from the Jesuit order, helped it to be recognized in Church circles. The fact that the productions of "Art India" were well received abroad was itself a point which brought home to the Indian Church that Indian Christian art should be given some importance.

Even Angelo da Fonseca pointed out: "In 1922 the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide wrote to all the superiors of the missions inquiring 'whether in the constructions and decorations of the sacred buildings and in the dwellings of the missionaries, they were solely adopting the foreign styles of art, or whether, on the contrary, they preserved as far as possible the local artistic decorations' " (quoted in his "Approach to the Understanding of Christian Art in India"). As pointed out earlier, Fr. Lederle was very much in the mainstream of post-Vatican II Council thinking on Mission and the need for the "local Church". He was able to place his concern for Indian Culture within the wider framework of a theology and ecclesiology which was basically incarnational and insisting on a local manifestation of the Universal Church within the rich plurality of cultures. There was a unity in Fr. Lederle's life and work, which meant that his interest in art was related to his wider interest in Indian culture as a whole, and to the need for an Indian Church rooted in that culture. This led him also to be very involved in the Indian Christian Ashram movement.

It is against the background of these various dimensions of Fr. Lederle's work that I can here add a more personal tribute. I first met Fr. Lederle in 1968 (when I was travelling in Maharashtra). In those days I was living in Kurisumala Ashram. Fr. Lederle was always interested in my involvement in Indian Christian Ashrams, and he was anxious to point out that he really felt that ashrams should encourage art, music and dancing. He often stressed that Angelo da Fonseca lived for many years in the Christa Prema Seva Ashram in Pune, and had benefited much from his experience there. It was his personal interest in this direction that led to our dreaming together of an "art ashram" in which Art should be taken as the *sadhana* of the community. The following passage, which I have found among his papers, could well characterize an approach to



art, based on spiritual experience, which was certainly close to Fr. Lederle's dream for Indian Christian art:

"Art, like any other human activity, must come out of an inward mystic life. Here again it is true that the Kingdom of God is within us. You look at the world; you study Indian and European painting; you love and like the Christian masterpieces in Western as well as Eastern art; but afterwards you must close your eyes and imitate neither the one nor the other. You must try to make your own creation..... Only out of personal holiness, out of an abundance of inward life which overflows into an external manifestation, will you be able to create, to mould into a harmonic unity the different elements of this new art, of this divine message which our times need."

It was certainly this vision of art as arising out of an inner quest, and drawing others into that interiority, that moved Fr. Lederle to believe in Indian Christian art. It was not just the style of Angelo da Fonseca which impressed him, but the way that style seemed to come out of an Indian spirituality. In that sense, Fr. Lederle was not interested in art for art's sake, but rather in art as an expression of an Indian spirituality. He also felt that Indian Christian art could contribute to the wider field of emerging Indian Christian spirituality. As he remarked in his "Experiences of a Publisher", he often found that the paintings he most believed in, like the austere works of Angelo da Fonseca, did not sell well. The Christian community wanted something glossy, colourful. But, for him, Art India was not just going to produce "bazaar art." Part of the difficulty in Angelo's paintings is the difficulty of the spirituality which it represents—a rather ascetical, austere spirituality, in which only devotion humanizes suffering. It was a spirituality which Fr. Lederle personally responded to. Repeatedly, it was this call to interiority which Fr. Lederle cherished in Indian culture. He wanted to relate this inner vision with the visions of Ignatius of Loyola. He wrote and asked me if I could paint these visions, and he discussed the inner mystical life of Loyola with me on several occasions. For Fr. Lederle that was the essence of the calling to be a Jesuit. And I do feel that in some very special way, Angelo da Fonseca was able to capture in his pictures something of the spirituality of the Jesuit order, perhaps through his long association with very spiritual Jesuits like Fr. Lederle.

Thinking of Fr. Lederle's attitude towards art and culture, one is impressed by the breadth of his vision, his truly universal, catholic outlook. He was deeply committed to the Church, but there was nothing narrow or sectarian about him. He was a very *friendly* man. And I do believe that herein lies the key to his character—he was one of those whom we could call a "Universal Brother." Fr. Lederle wanted art to be an expression of that universal brotherhood,—a real dialogue between peoples of different cultures. He did not appreciate just

Indian culture, he was a lover and admirer of his own Western culture. In Europe he showed to me treasures of Western Christian art with the same joy that in India he had shared with me the paintings of Angelo da Fonseca. It was his capacity for enthusiasm which always impressed others. He wanted to appreciate and admire everything. He was interested in modern Indian art, but he realized that it was not enough just to go back to the past. Being a good historian, he knew that it is essential to discover the link with the past, to feel part of a tradition. However, we must also respond creatively to the present, and realize that one of the essential elements of being historical creatures is the uniqueness of our present situation, which demands from us a radically new approach to the culture and times in which we live.

Finally, in trying to outline Fr. Lederle's personal contribution to the growth of Indian Christians art, I would like to mention that for many of us artists he was a "Father" in a very special way. Fr. Lederle's approach to art and artists has been essentially a pastoral one. His close friendship with artists like Angelo da Fonseca, Sr. Genevieve and Sr. Claire, has been a constant source of encouragement to these and many other artists, including myself. He was always willing to make himself available, to listen and share in our personal difficulties. I can say that I would never have been able to contribute my own creativity to the Church if it had not been for the constant care and guidance of Fr. Lederle. In this way he had not only helped many artists, but has also encouraged them to make a creative and fulfilling contribution to the life of the Church in India.



In the three lectures which Fr. Lederle gave at the Heras Institute, and which are here published, a broad perspective is offered concerning the relevance of this kind of art for the Church in India today. In earlier essays on this subject, by Taylor, Lehman, Butler, Hoefer, and Nicolas, we do not find the same wide concern to situate the work of artists representing the image of Jesus, in the emerging Church of India. Thus sections like "Christian Art in Ancient Kerala" and "Golden Goa" are valuable in that they fill out the broad canvas of an historically evolving Indian Christian ecclesiology. There are a number of Syrian Christians who feel that not enough notice is being taken, in current discussion on "inculturation", of the ancient Syrian tradition of imagery, and its impact on Indian culture as we find it in Kerala in the first centuries of our era. Something comparable to Jean Danielou's "Primitive Christian Symbols" will have to be attempted in relation to early Syrian Christian art in Kerala in order to outline the primitive sources of a truly indigenous Christian culture in India. The fact that there are few remains of this early period, and that whatever fragments we have are very primitive from the artistic point of view (as in also true of the art of the Catcombs, and even, for that matter,



ancient Syrian and Cappadocian Christian art), by no means diminishes the importance of such simple beginnings. It is in these primal efforts that we often touch on the most vital symbols which will later have a very important formative influence on more developed cultural forms. I feel that a similar movement of exciting beginnings is to be noted in tribal Christian art, which again often escapes notice simply because it does not qualify as "developed" or "fine" art.

Fr. Lederle mentions in his introduction certain important social forces which underlie the creation of a culture in the first place. It is, perhaps, by virtue of modern art criticism (as in the very influential work of the modern art critic John Berger) that it is now well recognized that art never exists in an aesthetic ivory tower of its own, but is integrally connected with geo-political and economic forces. The whole area of cross-cultural growth is a fascinating one, and it is in this context that we have to understand that "artists have often been inspired by religions other than their own", as Fr. Lederle notes. We must also take care not to make sweeping statements about "Indian Culture", forgetting that culture is itself a process, in which changes are all the time taking place. The growing self awareness of marginalized groups, like the tribals and Dalits, will have its own important impact on the Christian culture of the future.

Art is much influenced by the development of communication systems in society. Thus, for example, the introduction of the printing press in the sixteenth century had a great impact on the art of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. A similar sea-change was brought about by the advance of photographic technology at the beginning of our century. Subsequently the wide-spread influence of films, television, and now video camera technology has changed our whole approach to the image. The fact that now, through such readily available communication systems, we can see images from every nook and corner of the world and from very distant cultures projected into our own living rooms, means that the whole concept of an art belonging to a particular geographic region or religion, is now in need of a radical re-evaluation.

A comparable revolution has been created by the rapid advance of what is called "comparative religions". The fact that now every educated person can easily read the great classics of every religion, often translated into his own mother tongue, has meant that we have had to re-understand the religious belief-systems into which we have been born, in the light of many other systems of thought. It is now imperative for every individual to form a personal judgement on the "truth claims" of his own Faith in the light of other Faiths, and no one can simply dismiss other religions as irrelevant, or claim that the particular Faith into which he or she has been born has the monopoly over Truth. Mobility of ideas and images characterizes the culture of today, and we must take this into account when speaking of a Christian Culture of the future. I

feel, for example, that the fact that Indian artists have, in the last fifty years, painted Christian themes, is itself an indication of the availability of many images of Jesus painted by Western masters in Indian art schools. Thus, oddly enough, the representation of Jesus in Indian art is as much a sign of the "westernization" of Indian culture generally (which also means "modernization", or "humanization") as it is an indication of a new consciousness in the Indian Church that it must be more Indian.

There are issues which vitally concern our understanding of the way in which Asian Christian art is emerging—issues which are by no means limited to the field of culture, but underlie the whole understanding of the Church of the Third World, which, as Fr. Lederle points out, will soon be a church "come of age", with its own identity quite distinct from the Western-European Church, and even the earlier West-Asian Church from which our whole understanding of the Church, as we know it, was born.

As a result of his long experience of the use of art by Christians, especially in India, Fr. Lederle stresses the importance of the "devotional" aspect of images. In this sense he complements Dr. Masao Takenaka's approach which has been to stress that Asian images of Jesus and His message are a theological statement, as valid as any verbal or written statement. One senses, reading the essays of Fr. Lederle, that for him art is emotive: it is not so much a visual exegesis but a Faith-response, comparable to Bhakti-devotion in the Hindu tradition. Thus he sees art as a *sadhana*, that is, a spiritual quest, both for the artist and for those who use the image meditatively as a way to God.

These papers on "Christian Painting in India through the Centuries" will be an important contribution to the now growing body of literature on this subject, coming, as these reflections do, from a person who devoted much concern to the enriching of Christian culture in the Indian Church of today.

Jyoti Sahi





The Risen Christ:

Frank Wesley



The Rich Young Man.

Frank Wesley



Nativity.

Frank Wesley



Dhyana.

Angelo da Fonseca



The Master.

Angelo da Fonseca



Ecce Homo.

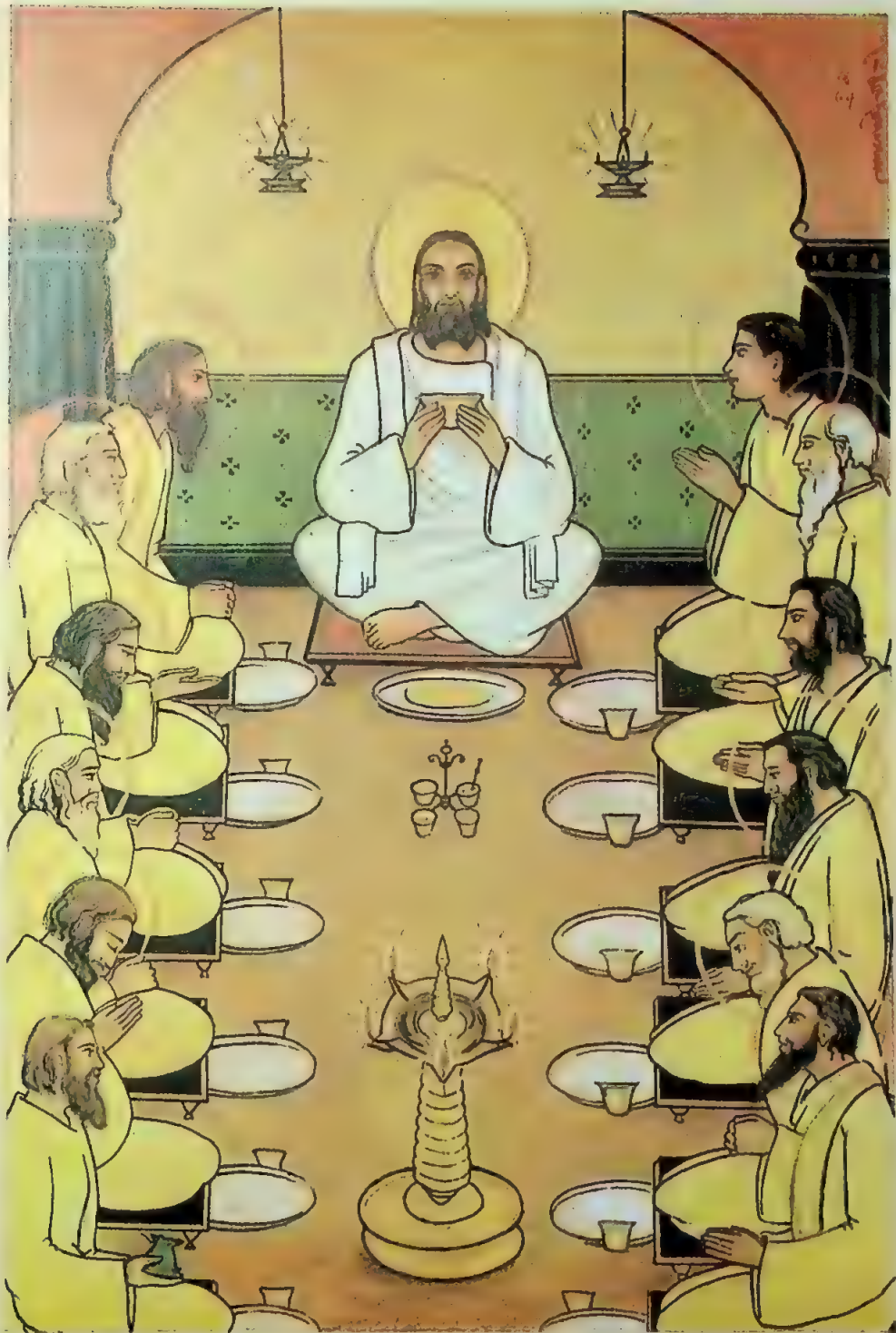
Angelo da Fonseca



Ecce Homo.

Angelo da Fonseca





The Last Supper.

Angelo da Fonseca



The Shepherd.

V.S. Masoji



The Visit of the Maji.

A.D. Thomas



## CHRISTIAN PAINTING IN INDIA THROUGH THE CENTURIES

“Christian Painting in India through the Centuries” was the theme of the 1984 Heras Memorial Lectures, in Bombay. The Heras Memorial Lectures honour the memory of Fr. Henry Heras, S.J., (1888-1955), indologist, visionary and pioneer in his field of research. The lectures pertaining to Indian History and Culture, are organised by the Heras Institute of Indian History and Culture. Fr. Heras was keenly interested in the field of Indian Christian art. He discovered and fostered Angelo da Fonseca, one of the pioneers of modern Indian Christian art; he also requested in 1949, Shiavax D. Chawda, a well-known Bombay artist, to prepare a series of paintings on the Christ-theme.





## INTRODUCTION

The very title "Christian Painting in India" raises several questions, particularly in relation to terming painting Christian. One hears of Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, Christian Art, and understands by this the artistic expressions of a particular religio-cultural group, as also the painting of subjects related to a specific religion. The art of a particular religio-cultural group envisages, for example, painting by a Hindu in view of his own religious convictions. However this religious identity need not include exclusively a socio-cultural identity. A Christian may share his belief with people of diverse cultural traditions, though, of course, religion strongly influences cultural expressions. It is possible, and historically has been so, for a variety of reasons, that the specific cultural expression of a religion regards itself as the authentic (or, at least, a more authentic) cultural form of a religion. Western religious expressions of Christianity (a religion of an oriental, West Asian origin) were, not so many years ago, taken as normative, at least by a good number of its adherents. Here we speak of Christian Painting in India, with reference to a particular regional focus—the cultures predominant in the Indian sub-continent. Finally, Christian painting is considered not only in our times but throughout the history of Christianity in India.

Themes of subjects related to a specific religion, are not the exclusive domain of an artist professing that particular religious allegiance. Artists have often been inspired by religions other than their own. One can understand that certain subjects are more closely related to the basic orientation of a religion so that someone could mention a picture to be very 'Hindu' or 'Christian', though the subject itself may be of 'unity' or 'service'.

Added importance is adduced to the theme "Christian Painting in India through the Centuries" from the view-point of world-wide Christianity. For the past several hundred years, Christianity has

been centered in the West. Now the shift in population percentages has deep-seated and far-reaching cultural implications. At present, the majority of Catholics live in the Third World; by the year 2000 AD, this will have increased to a two-third majority. By then, the majority of all Christians will be in the so-called Third World. Christianity has understood the need to "inculturate" itself, as it is called, into new situations and cultures, into the new emerging cultures of the third millenium, as also into the cultures of non-Christian majorities, especially in Asia. Christian Painting in India has, therefore, to be seen in the light of the emergence of Asia and of Christianity's efforts to take root in the cultures of a continent where it originated. With the vast geographical areas of Asia and its diverse cultural heritage, this cultural root-taking has to be considered for each area in its own right.

Christian painting deserves to be considered in the context of India. The scope of Christian painting in India is very wide, covering, as it does, geographically, what is now the Republic of India, an area extensive and culturally diverse. Eighty-four per cent of its people call themselves Hindus. The second largest religious community, much smaller than the first, is formed by the Muslims. Christians form the next largest community, around twenty million of them, again much smaller than the Muslims. The Christian community is not a homogeneous community, being a community of faith and not of ethnicity, and so, as diverse as the areas they hail from. In most parts of India some local people profess Christianity; in some areas one finds stronger representation. Only the states Mizoram and Nagaland have Christian majorities. There are strong minorities in Meghalaya, Kerala and Goa.

There are Christians who trace their unity in faith way back to St. Thomas, one of the Apostles of Christ, and to later emigrants to Kerala under the leadership of Thomas Cana, probably in 345 AD. The latter are known as the Knanaya Christian Community of Kerala, also called the Southists. There is also the historically uncertain though probable arrival in India of a second Apostle of Christ, St. Bartholomew, at Kalyan near Bombay. The Kerala tradition is important but material regarding it needs to be more thoroughly researched.

Other later Christian groups grew during the time of the Portuguese in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, especially in Goa,



Bassein, Daman, Diu, and some other places along the west and east coasts of India. During these centuries and following, there has also been a substantial Christian presence outside Portuguese territories, mainly in Tamilnadu in South India and at the Moghul court in North India. Indian Christian Art will be found both within the then Portuguese territories and also outside it. The period of the earlier Western colonial expansion, as it is called, left its cultural imprint both within the area of Western domination, for example, in Central and South America and the Philippines, as well as beyond, as in China.

The third period of renewed Christian impact on India began with the coming of the British. William Carey and Alexander Duff had great influence on the Christian approach to the Indian situation. Compared with the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, less emphasis was now laid on cultural aspects. Education, spreading of the printed word (of the Gospel) and social work were given pre-eminence. During the decennia of this third period from the first part of the nineteenth century up to independence, after people from the leading strata of society had turned to Christ, it was the poor and the marginalized groups that turned to Christianity so that today of the Christian community in India about one-third is of Scheduled Caste and one-fifth of Scheduled Tribe origin. Taken together, they still constitute slightly more than half of the Christian people. The social origins of a good number of older Christians are difficult to determine in a religion which stresses brotherhood and equality and which is essentially opposed to caste stratification. The Thomas Christians, groups of Christians in Goa and some other specific groups have been recognized by their surroundings as belonging to the so-called higher castes. The composition of a social group will have its influence on its artistic ideals as they, on their part, are influenced by social positions. It has to be admitted that if there were a group without the least consciousness of caste—and this unfortunately cannot be said of Christians—it still could not escape being classified by caste considerations. As Christians have no 'home-land' of their own outside their own social and ethnic origin, it was a natural outcome of the movement towards national integration that Christians would ask themselves more about their own roots and the proper place where they belonged. Within this framework we have to search for the roots of modern Christian art in India.

In the context of this study I do not speak about all forms of art. Distinct from the 'useful' arts (as, for example, agriculture) are the 'fine arts' including the graphic arts along with drawing, painting, sculpture, ceramics, and, at times, architecture. Some also include literature, music, the dramatic arts and dancing. I am here concerned with only a section of the fine arts, namely, with painting, and only by exception shall I refer to other sections of the fine arts. Before us, therefore, is what pertains to painting, related to Christian themes in the religio-socio-cultural context of India.

### *The Indian Cultural Context*

There is a culturally unifying dynamism within most of the Indian sub-continent brought about by a common reference to Sanskrit and the religio-philosophical ideas expressed through it. One must, however, admit great diversities, as for example, the culture of the *adivasis*, the 'first inhabitants' of India, and the strong identity of the Islamic traditions. Here I restrict myself to the dominant and pervasive Hindu influence.

Early in the Hindu tradition one sees a turning within—a movement and search for a final and lasting principle. There was not so much an effort to dominate the external world but to know and master the inner world. The ultimate unifying force, it was recognized, in a long process of reflection and introspection, was not any part of the body or of breath, but an inner principle called the *atma* (m) or *atman* (n). And as the search deepened, the *atma* (or *atman*) underlying the self of man and the *brahma* (m) or *brahman* (n) underlying the material universe were finally realized as one and the same, leaving a certain freedom to a variety of interpretations regarding the relation of the final principle of unity to the multiplicity of beings. One should not be astonished that this inner vision, this fundamental openness to the beyond, has ingrained itself deeply in the Indian psyche.

Paintings then are not meant to be realistic presentations of visible forms (especially of the human body); they spring from an intuitive vision. Mario Bussagli writes:

“...although it is difficult to give a precise definition of the complex set of phenomena of Indian art through the centuries, it can be stated that the figural space of Hindu India



springs from a dynamico-psychological conception which reduces the inertia of the material through movement—either clearly and even realistically rendered or simply suggested to the imagination of the beholder—and the lively tension and energy of the still body. The preference for rounded surfaces and lack of angularity (angularity is to be found only in the Gandhara art and in the production of Mathura at the time of Kushans) is a consequence of this attitude to space and of the manner in which the image is visualized in it.” (Mario Bussagli, *Calembus Sivaramamurti, 5000 Years of the Art of India*, New York, Bombay, p. 313) “The Indian world outlook again and again refers to the flow, the movement of life between the poles of creation and destruction knowing the destructability of individual life but acknowledging beyond and above an immovable undivided principle which vivifies all of life and which is the life of the universe. There has been an effort the better to render the essence of the category represented. This process of idealization explains more clearly than any commentary the original meaning of the word ‘rupa’, namely ‘form’ which was first ‘prestige’ and later became ‘beauty’.” (*Ibid.*, p. 17).

In many ways the arts have been linked with religion in India, which does not mean that there has been only religious art. To claim this would overlook the rich variety of contributions to the formation of art and the diversity of themes expressed. Still religion permeates the whole fabric of life in India in the form of *varna-ashrama-dharma*, *dharma* (religious duty) in relation to *varna* (colour, caste) and *ashramas* (four subsequent divisions in the life of the individual)—linking the life of society and that of the individual to a code of life sanctioned by an eternal law. Religion has brought about many external expressions, especially of devotions, which have created many visible artistic forms; it is also present in the area of spirituality. Here Hindu tradition is not so much concerned with argumentation and speculation; it is primarily concerned with the step from the physical, comprehensible, visible... to the spiritual, incomprehensible, invisible. For this step a means or *sadhana* is required. The breadth of this understanding of spirituality can be seen in that any human expression can become a means of realisation. Of the means often referred to are *mantra*, *yantra* and *tantra*. A

*mantra* refers to what is audible, a *yantra* to what is visible and a *tantra* to a line of conduct, often of an erotic nature. A *yantra* is more directly connected with painting. In its presentation, a *yantra* contains condensed meaning which can be unlocked through concentration and meditation. It would be wrong to see in any religious presentation a *yantra* as a concentration of power, even of some magical power; it would also be wrong to see in every picture only a mere artistic presentation of a religious event. Often an artist has been guided by a canon of intricate prescriptions regarding forms and colours which have been considered to be in some way spirituality effective, and his very art of painting may have been for him a '*sadhana*', a means to become more fully himself.

### *Religious Presentation in Christianity*

In the following we are concerned with presentation of Christian themes in Indian style. Christianity is not exuberantly free in the use of artistic forms and signs in the field of making the divine visible as seen among sections of Hindu society. There has been a consciousness that external forms can deviate the mind from God who always remains transcendent to anything finite. Christianity does not, however, share the prohibition of visible presentations of the divine mysteries in concrete forms, as in Islam; it sees in these forms genuine symbols and analogies of the spiritual; the finite too is considered to be permeated by God.

Within the biblical and Christian traditions the attitude towards visible presentations of religious themes is the result of a long history. The Old Testament, the originally Jewish part of the Bible, referring to the period before Christ's coming, rejected any production and cultic use of representations. Beware, "lest you act corruptly by making a graven image for yourselves, in the likeness of male or female, the likeness of any beast...bird, etc." (Deut. 4:15-19). However the Ark of the Covenant was an object of cultic veneration. Originally, the restrictions referred to were in view of representations of Yahwe, the name for God in the Jewish tradition. Later the prohibition was also explicit regarding representations of other gods. The disciples of Christ first followed the injunctions of the Old Testament, but with the coming of Christ, "the image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15), the situation had for them basically changed. Already in the catacombs in Rome, these series of vaulted galleries





Mother Theresa.

M.F. Hussein



Resurrection.

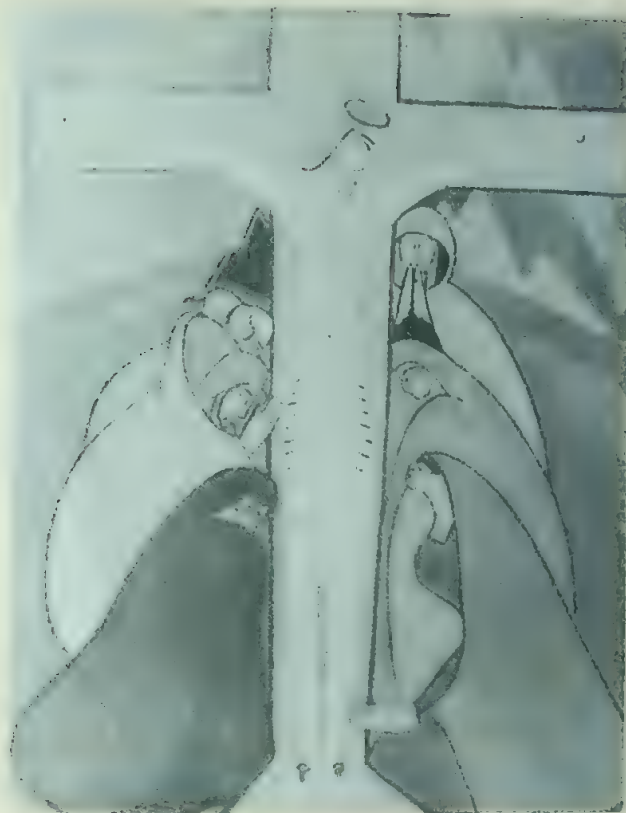
S. Gujral



Sacrifice.

K.K. Hebbar





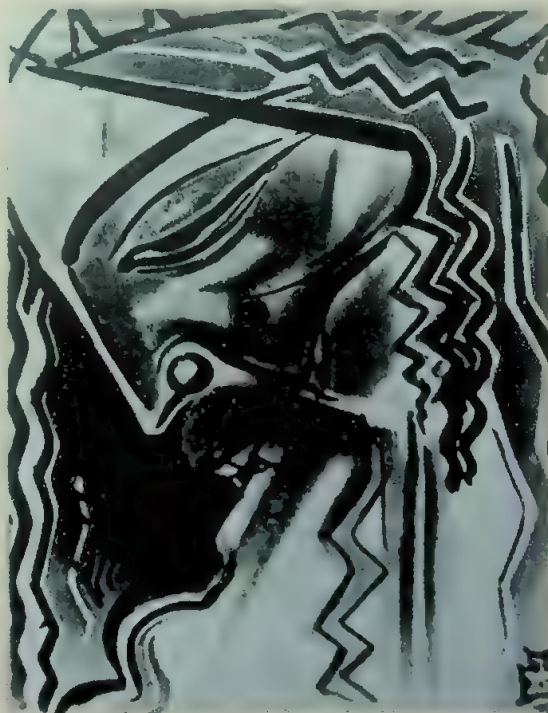
Crucified.

Arup Das



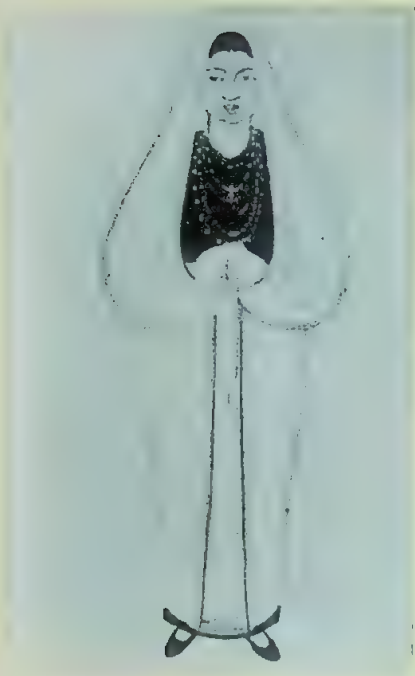
Christ.

Kanwal Krishna



Christ.

S. Chauda



Christian Woman of 1948.  
Laxman Pai



Adam and Eve. Badri Narayan



Supper at Emmaus.

F.N. Souza



in underground burial places used for worship by Christians especially during periods of persecution in the earliest centuries, symbols for and later representations of Christ were used.

Throughout its history Christianity has had to define its use of visible presentations, and there have been iconoclastic tendencies especially during the Byzantine period, the Reformation and in our own times. The reasons in each period varied. In the eighth century Byzantine emperors, encouraged by some bishops and by Jewish and Muslim influences, forbade the use of pictures. John of Damascus and others answered that, owing to his incarnation, Christ became the icon of the Father and thus a pictorial presentation of Christ is possible for Christians and even required. At the time of the reformation visual presentations were rejected, where they were considered to stand in the way of *sola gratia*, *sola fides*, *sola scriptura*, grace alone, faith alone, scripture alone. While Zwingli and Calvin rejected the use of pictures and statues radically, one sees in Luther a recognition, even a recommendation of pictorial representations. The modern Christian reaction to religious presentations arises from a fight against unworthy over-sentimental pictures and statues and from the difficulty in finding a pictorial art-form to suit the rather abstract functional style of building in recent years. To this must be added the widespread estrangement between pictorial modern art and expectations for paintings in houses of prayer. This estrangement is not however universal. The reasons against pictorial presentations in our times are not so much of a theological as of a psychological nature.

Christianity, on the whole, admits the use of visual presentations. There is a difference of emphasis between Orthodox Christian, Roman Catholic and Protestant attitudes: the Roman Catholic attitude being a middle position between a pronounced veneration of pictures, icons, by the Orthodox Christians and a widespread reaction against any veneration of pictures among many traditional Protestants. The Roman Catholic position already appears at the Council of Nikaia (787 AD) and again at the Council of Trent (1545-63) and was also expressed by St. Thomas Aquinas. The latter said that there is no obligation to venerate pictures, but one may do so (as one may salute a flag). God as prototype deserves absolute adoration; a saint absolute veneration; pictures deserve a relative adoration or veneration, which means the response of the

onlooker is directed towards the person represented, not towards the picture. At the level of various major Christian denominations there are differences in attitudes towards life, celebration and pictorial presentations; at the level of individuals this is not always so. Individuals often adopt attitudes different from their denomination in these fields without becoming outsiders to their specific denominations.

Any religious art must clarify its stand on how the religiously inspired person may use a representation within a religious cult. Often pictures and other images are not the object of this so-called relative adoration or veneration, but they are simply used because they inspire and are pleasing to the eye. But the use of visual presentations cannot be restricted to this level of aesthetics and psychology only.



## CHRISTIAN ART IN ANCIENT KERALA

A survey of Christian art in India will reveal a certain poverty of artistic expression within the Christian community. The small but good book by S. Sivaramamurty, *Indian Painting* (National Book Trust, New Delhi, 1970), does not contain a single Christian theme. Members of the majority community at times are so absorbed in the majority presentation that they overlook genuine value in minority or marginal groups. Still, Christians have a cultural deficit in India. An answer to this can probably be found in the legend about St. Thomas mentioned in the *Acta Thomae*. The story goes that when Thomas came to the court of Gondophares at Taxila in Northern India, the king asked him, "What do you know to practise?" Thomas answered, "In wood I know how to make yokes and ploughs and ox-goads, cars for barges and ferry boats, and masts for ships; and in hewn stone, tomb and stones and monuments and palaces for kings". The King said to him, "Will you build me a palace?" Thomas replied, "I will build it and furnish it, for I have come to work at buildings and carpentry". Thomas also confirmed that he was the disciple of a carpenter and an architect. The king gave him a large sum of money to build a palace. But Thomas went through the villages, spoke about the Good News of Christ and gave the money to the poor. The King did not get his palace of stone. In his anger he intended punishing Thomas severely. But then he finally came to understand that Thomas had not built him a palace of stone, but by helping the poor he had built for the king a palace in heaven.

One wonders whether Christians have not built this palace in heaven hoping for a reward in afterlife for the service done on earth, neglecting to build palaces and monuments of art in stone. Surely at present Christians have mighty functional buildings, but where are the monuments of art! As regards the past, one can point

to the humid climate of Kerala, the region where they lived, a climate which does not allow paintings and woodwork to last long. There was also no enduring royal patronage which would have been instrumental in supporting the construction of lasting monuments.

Up to the arrival of the Portuguese in the 16th century Christians in Kerala had no regular contacts with Europe. Their religious contacts were with the East Syrian Patriarch of Mesopotamia (now in Iraq) who sent bishops to Kerala; but the effective administration of the community was in the hands of local leaders and archdeacons. This brought about the specific indigenous life and culture of the Christians in Kerala. They have been called "Hindu in culture, Christian in faith, oriental in worship". (*The St. Thomas Christian Encyclopaedia of India*, II, Trichur, 1973, pp. 107-112). There are not many artistic remains from the period before 1498 when Vasco da Gama arrived in India. A picture of Mary and the Christ Child, being part of the St. Thomas Mount Church, Madras, is definitely not as old as the stone cross on the altar, found in excavations in the 16th century. (*Ibid.*, p. 146). The picture of Mary and the Child Jesus, attributed to St. Luke, was a favourite of the Jesuits, and so one can safely regard it as having been inspired by a sample brought by them. This would exclude any date prior to their arrival in the sixteenth century. We know of a church at Quilon (early 14th century) adorned shortly afterwards with paintings by a wandering Franciscan friar.

There must have been paintings of Christian themes in Kerala before the coming of the Portuguese, but even the *St. Thomas Christian Encyclopaedia of India*, II, treating of Christianity in Kerala, refers only to one extant picture dating from before the 16th century—a 13th century painting in the orthodox Syrian Church at Cheppad. (*Ibid.*, p. 152). Taking into account artistic presentations other than paintings, one recognizes that what is preserved indicates that religious art was attuned to the Hindu surroundings, drawing inspiration, with regard to artistic expression, from Hindu culture. There are still pillars (*stambhas*), churches (*devalayas*), and liturgical objects belonging to an earlier time. The pre-sixteenth century Christian churches had, like Hindu temples, large halls (*mahamandapas*), a smaller sanctuary (*garbhagriha*) and towers (*shikaras*). *Stambhas*, high vertical structures, had their place in



Hindu, Buddhist and Jain architecture. Among Christians a cross has taken their place. In concrete cases it is difficult to determine the age of such crosses as exact historical evidence is often not available. We know for sure that the granite cross at the Kaduthuruthy church was consecrated on Good Friday, 1599, by the Archbishop of Goa, Menezes. (*Ibid.*, p. 139). Could it be that the base of the granite cross, proportionately too large for the cross and depicting elephants, is of an older origin? The so-called bleeding cross on St. Thomas Mount, Madras, is said to be from the 8th century. (*Ibid.*, p. 200). It is interesting to note that at Kanjoor the base of the stone cross is lotus-shaped; it is said that a Maharaja of the twelfth century contributed the rock work to renovate the church. No doubt, this rock work and, for example, also the base of the baptismal font at Kanjoor depicting a monkey, differ from the Goan Baroque tradition.

The huge baptismal font of Kaduthuruthy has carvings with floral symbols and biblical scenes. (*Ibid.*, p. 184-5). It has been said that "the Thomas Christians were not very proficient in the fine arts. They engaged themselves in such professions as agriculture, commerce and military practices, which were considered noble." (*Ibid.*, II, p. 108). There are ancient churches with an armoury (*ayudhapura*) at the entrance where the men could deposit their weapons before entering the church for worship. "Christians were well-knit into the overall social context resulting in a parallel development of temple architecture and church architecture in Kerala... The artisans and technicians were Hindus". (*Ibid.*, p. 151) This leaves open the possibility that Hindu artisans were asked to create figures and designs from their own traditions. This was done even in Goa under the Portuguese. Still one can state that the Christian tradition in Kerala contains the first religious expressions of the Christian communities in India.





## MIDDLE AGES

### 'Golden Goa'

In 1510, Afonso de Albuquerque conquered Goa which was to become the centre of the Portuguese colonial presence in the East. Goa also became a great centre of missionary work. The new Christians were instructed in the Christian faith which soon reverberated also in songs, feasts and family and social customs. And when in 1554 the incorrupt body of Francis Xavier was brought back from the Far East, the people had their saint also. It did not take long till a new Christian culture grew up, the only one in India specifically Christian, comprising both the sacred and the profane. Mulk Raj Anand writes, "The churchmen who came to India and wished to ally themselves with the new converts, may have felt that they should surrender to the sense of glory of the great Hindu temples of the Chalukya, Pallava, Chola and Dhera edifices, even if they had to relax from their Jesuitical logic. And they also had to answer the sense of wonder in the eyes of the fold, by enclosing the mystery in huge overpowering buildings. In fact, they had to accept the romanticisms of the men and women used to think of the infinite God as the biggest by the illimitable, the ultimate harmony". ("In Praise of Christian Art in Goa", *Marg, A Magazine of the Arts*, XXXII, 4, 1980, pp. 11-12).

José Pereira explains that the churches in Goa are the most impressive religious buildings on the west coast of India as far north as Gujarat. The cathedral in Goa is larger than any Hindu temple and its vaults soar above any mosque in India: this cathedral, erected between 1568 and 1631, is the prime creation of the Roman revival anywhere in the Portuguese world. The style of Goa's religious buildings, allowing exceptions, is born out of the intense mystical tradition of the Counter Reformation. Under all the flamboyance there is a Gothic basis related to the style called Manueline (referring

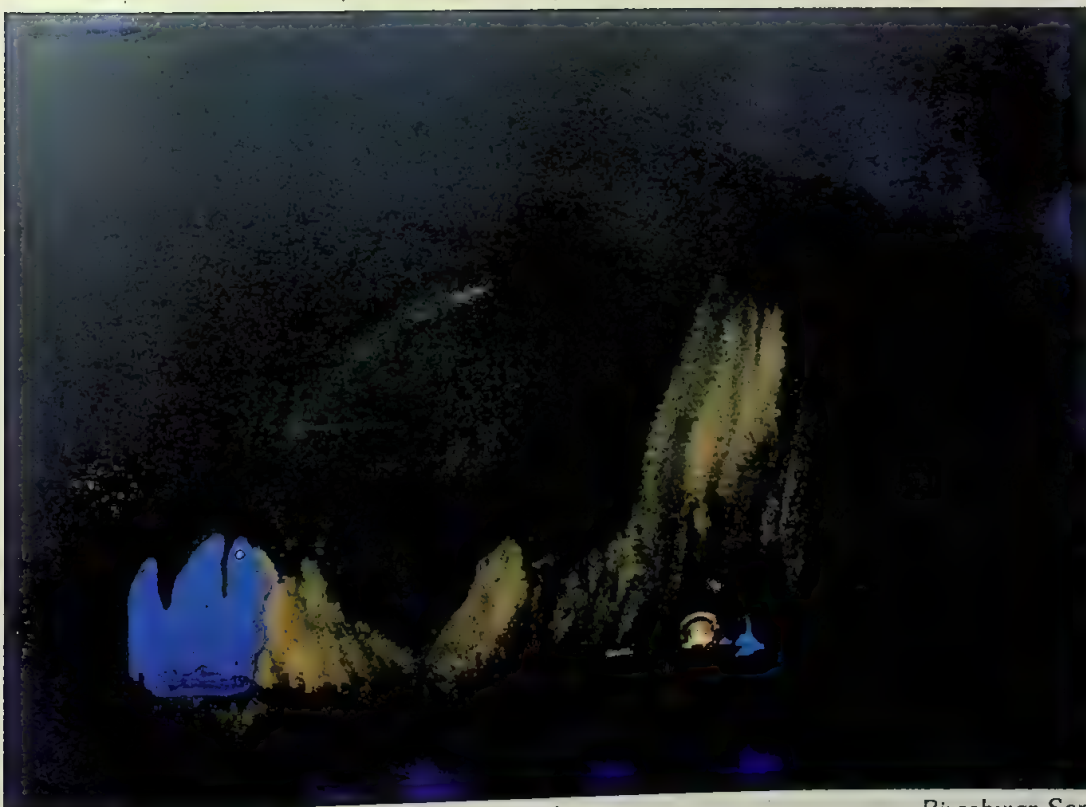
to Manuel I (1495-1521). Indian baroque is a style of its own, not only because the architects and craftsmen of India have contributed to it, but because it has continued the features of church architecture developed in Kerala. These features, Indian in origin, include a basic acceptance of the outlay of the Hindu temple, the Indian canon of proportions and of the treatment of architectural units, the use of Indian motifs, the specific structure of the vault and the principle that monumentality demands a corresponding multiplicity. (*Ibid.*, pp. 68-9). Goa was called "Golden Goa" due to the splendour lavished on the interior of its churches. A later poet, Tomas Ribeiro (1831-1900), wrote, "... The Muslim, Hindu, Armenian, Parsi and Arab merchants... brought to our emporium, Goa, the silver of the mines of Japan and of Chicon; the pearls of Manaar and Bahrein; the amethysts, sapphires, topazes and emeralds of Ceylon; the prodigiously large diamonds of Vijayanagar and Golkonda; the rubies of Pegu which sparkle at night; the porcelain, lacquer, satins, damasks and gold and silver embroidery of China and Japan; the opium of the Ghats, Cochin and Muscat; and the riches of Bengal, Siam and Oceania". (Ribeiro, Tomas, *Entre palmeiras*, VI, in *Marg*, *Ibid.*, p. 53).

The new religion brought along sculptures in ivory and wood; indigenous artists were called to create similar images. In doing so, they were freed from the minute prescriptions of traditional Hindu image making; they were to create human figures expressing human feelings of piety, devotion, submission to God. Some of these statues are extraordinarily good, and highly valued objects. Painters too were called to contribute to art, though paintings in Goa as in the whole of the Baroque tradition had a subordinate position. They only decorated the vaults of the Goan churches which did not have their whole ceilings painted in monumental presentations opening the vision to the spiritual world made immediate, as in other baroque traditions. Statues and reliefs were richly coloured. Paintings in churches were done on wooden boards and fixed between panels. There was a variety of themes treated such as the birth of Christ and the crucifixion. Often popular saints were painted—the Madonna, St. Christopher, St. Sebastian, St. Magdalen, and the Archangel Michael. Their paintings not seldom appear stylized and stiff; due to the passing of centuries oil paintings have darkened. One cannot but feel that the local artists



Assumption.

Bireshwar Sen



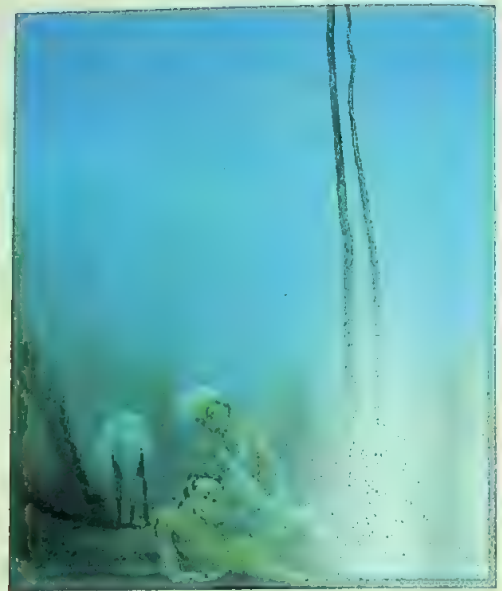
Nativity.

Bireshwar Sen





Madonna and Child. N.K. Mishra



The Good Samaritan Frank Wesley



A Home in Nazareth

J. Periera



Sermon on the Mount.

*Angela Trindade*



Suffering Christ.

*D.J. Prim*



felt constrained by imitating western models. Some canvas paintings had been painted abroad and put in churches. There are also several secular paintings in Goa, such as the severe, stylized paintings of Albuquerque in the palace of the Governor at Panjim.

Christian art in Goa is definitely Portuguese-inspired, but it has incorporated Indian elements created to a large extent by Indian artists. We have claimed the Greek-inspired Gandhara art and the various Islam-inspired forms of art as Indian, namely the figure of Buddha and the building of the Taj Mahal. Even if we admit that the art of Goa is somewhat aloof from the broader Indian context, we have neglected to claim Indo-Portuguese baroque as belonging to the heritage of Indian traditions. There is every right to do this! And in doing this a beautiful new stream is added to the broad river of Indian culture.

●

### *At the Moghul Court*

During the Portuguese period there was a type of presentation of Christian themes quite different from the forms of art seen within the Portuguese dominated territories. This form of painting developed at the Moghul court in North India. The emperors who ruled over large territories of India between 1526 and 1764 belong to the so-called Moghul dynasty; they were related to the Mongol Chingiz Khan and the Turk Timur. The Emperor Akbar (1542-1605) invited a delegation of Jesuits from Goa to participate in the regular religious discussions at the Ibadat-Khana or Chamber of Worship. His aim was that his subjects would eventually come closer to a common Divine Path (Din-i-Ilahi) or Divine Monotheism (Tauhid-i-Ilahi). The Jesuit delegation first stayed for three years, from 1580 to 1583. The stay would continue, with some interruptions, at the court for many years.

At the Moghul court, miniature paintings were much appreciated. The word miniature is derived from the Latin word *minium*, lead-red, actually painting in lead-red; then there is also the meaning of small pictures in manuscripts. On Indian soil a highly developed miniature art form evolved when India came in direct contact with the civilization of Islam. The use of paper, often imported from Persia or also from China, helped the diffusion of this art. Persian influence was great as regards style, and was pro-

pagated by artists steeped in Persian culture. But this did not prevent the rise of capable Indian artists. The subjects of miniatures were legends, historic events, erotic subjects in a refined way and portraits. Under Akbar the court painting school rose to a place of eminence.

Among the gifts which the Jesuits brought to the court of Akbar were paintings and engravings which created not a little interest and excitement. Europe was then passing through one of its most creative cultural periods. Michaelangelo had died only a few years earlier, in 1564. The paintings which the Jesuits presented to the emperor showed a masterly use of perspective. They were neither mythological in their presentation of religious themes nor merely secular. The religious was shown in a human context, making the divine transparent in human form. Here were human persons with their feelings, joys and sufferings, in a religious context which was something new. Court artists copied these paintings; later they imitated them and finally they created compositions of their own of Christian themes in Indian style. In Islam it is forbidden to portray religious figures. Akbar's court painters did present religious scenes. The emperor used the texts of the decrees of the Council of Trent on the veneration of pictures to justify his own use of them. Even today, several of these paintings, some of considerable quality, are in existence, mainly in museums in Europe and America. Perhaps this is providential. In 1938, Fr. Felix zu Loewenstein, S.J., saw at Hyderabad several of these miniatures, some of high quality. When I visited Hyderabad a few years ago, I was told that none of them were in existence any more. With the end of the Nizam's rule, these treasures seem to have been dispersed; and no one seems to know what has happened to these miniatures.

Christian miniatures of the Moghul period do have their peculiarities. At the Itihas Samshodhan Mandal, Pune, there is a picture of the Magi, the Wise Men (or "Kings") from the East who came to meet Christ. In the picture there are queens, not kings, shown, and each queen has a feather in her hair, considered a Western fashion at that time. Another miniature depicts the ascension of Christ. As the only Christian religious leaders known at the court were Jesuits, Christ ascending into heaven has the dress of a Jesuit of that time. This picture is in the Portland Art Museum,

Portland, Oregon, USA. In some pictures it is possible to recognize the original model. A miniature of the period of Jehangir (1605-27) is an elaboration of an engraving by Bernaert van Orley (1492-1542). The picture, signed by Chulam-i-Shah, interprets in its own way the carefully drawn drapery of the robe. The artist may have been inspired by the drapery in ancient Buddhist works. The face of the Madonna reveals the painter's Moghul background. The Madonna sits in Indian style on the ground. Another picture shows the Holy Family, St. Joseph being dressed as a Jesuit. Behind a tree, is portrayed, as in the west, a young girl holding her dress in her left hand so as to form a fold suggestive of maternity. There is a miniature painted on a manuscript page showing the Emperor Shahjehan (1627-58) holding the picture of the Madonna in his hand. (The above three pictures are in M. Bussagli and C. Sivaramamurti, *op. cit.*, pp. 297-300). This picture, it is known, was very dear to him. As the court painters did not know the art of printing engravings, they tried to create the same effect by using dots with the finest pointed brushes.

The pictures of the Moghul period fit into the so-called method of adaptation of that period; this means that Christianity should be adapted in its form to the respective cultures. Today this method is called inculturation. Well-known representatives of this are Thomas Stephens, S.J. of Goa (1549-1610) who wrote the *Khrista Purana* in Marathi, a narrative poetic presentation of the story of creation and redemption, the Sanskrit and Tamil scholar, Roberto de Nobili, S.J. (1597-1656), and Constans Beschi, S.J. (1680-1747) who created the famous Tamil classic, *Tambavani*. It is something that the first attempt to present Christian paintings in Indian style was not done by Christians but by non-Christians at the Moghul imperial court.



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Mother of the Lord. Sr. Genevieve



Adam. O.C. Rodrigues



Mother and Child

Anon



The Child with his Mother Mary.  
C. Weissmann



Behold the Cross.

Sr. Theresa



Children of the Tribe.

Marcus Topno



## MODERN TIMES

### *A Time of Transition*

The establishment of British rule in India heralds the start of the modern period. During the time of transition, churches continued to be built—Nossa Senhora do Carmo, Vonvottem, Kurhtori, Goa, 1780-82; St. Paul's Cathedral, Calcutta 1784-87; St. Andrew's Kirk, Madras, 1818-21; etc. But there was nothing really creative in Indian Christian art, just as there was no creative development in India as a whole. D.S. Sharma wrote, "Her (India's) own civilization and culture had been at the lowest ebb for over a hundred years from about the middle of the eighteenth century. In this dark period nothing of first-rate importance was produced in any language... and almost all indigenous arts languished and died away owing to lack of patronage and even of appreciation". (D.S. Sharma, *Hinduism Through the Ages*, p. 62).

This cultural ebb also explains the considerable influence of the rather ordinary so-called (East India) 'Company Art', mainly secular in character. The renewal of Indian Christian art in modern times has to be seen against the background of this exhaustion of cultural traditions in India and of the influence of the West, directly from outside or developed in the country itself.

### *Non-Christians Paint Christian Themes*

The renaissance of modern Indian society began with the contact with the West and with Western Christianity. This then facilitated a return to indigenous sources followed by various attempts to combine the new and the old. Indigenous Christianity, that is, the Thomas tradition and the Goan tradition in India, in its lack of cultural creativity at the beginning of the modern period reflected the general attitude and situation in the country. A

member of the Syrian Christian community holds that this was due to the close integration of this community with the rest of society around. In Goa, a repressive anti-religious policy and the eviction of many religious orders in 1835 had weakened the religious spirit.

The first socio-religious reform movement in modern Hinduism was the Brahmo Samaj (Society of the Worshippers of Brahma). Raja Ram Mohan Ray (1772-1833), often called the first modern Indian person, as also the Tagore family, were closely connected with this new foundation. Closely aligned with the Brahmo Samaj was the Santiniketan Ashram, a centre for the renewal of culture and education. It became also the place where Ravindranath Tagore lived and built his several houses in search of more light by living in close harmony with nature. Santiniketan will have a great impact on modern Indian Christian art, precisely because it shared with the Brahmo Samaj the general attitude to Christianity. Western Christianity, on the whole, in a unitarian, deist and rationalist presentation, exercised a great influence. On the part of the Brahmo Samaj this corresponded with an open acknowledgement of the inspirational character of Christ and his teaching, especially the Sermon on the Mount. (Cf. M.M. Thomas, *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance*, London, 1969).

Ram Mohan Ray, searching for a moral, spiritual base for the renewal of Indian society, wrote in the preface to his book, *The Precepts of Jesus, the Guide to Peace and Happiness* (pp. iii-iv): "This simple code of religion and morality is so admirably calculated to elevate man's ideas to high and liberal notions of One God who has equally subjected all living creatures without distinction of caste, rank or wealth, to change, disappointment, pain and death, and has equally admitted all to be partakers of the bountiful mercies which he has lavished over nature, and is also so well fitted to regulate the conduct of the human race in the discharge of their various duties to God, to themselves and to society, that I cannot but hope the best efforts from its promulgation in the present form".

Keshav Chandra Sen, who after Ram Mohan Ray and Devendranath Tagore took up the leadership of the Brahmo Samaj, wrote, "The rules (or the ethics of Christ) of forgiveness and love, meekness, humility, charity, justice, serenity and simplicity, the rules of poverty, self-restraint and asceticism constitute the higher

standards of true ethics which must find acceptance in all parts of the world... He is present not only in God but also in the hearts of his disciples... In accepting him, therefore, you accept the spirit of a *yogi*, a loving *bhakta*—the fulfillment of your national scriptures and prophets". (*The Voice of Keshav*, II, Bombay, 1970, pp. 30-3).

Christ is seen as an ideal human being with great moral strength inspiring to simplicity and restraint and making suffering meaningful; he is full of compassion identifying with the poor and the down-trodden; but he is also united with and one with God. He is the fulfillment of India's inspiration and one of its own. Christ is seen as an Asian, an Oriental, to whom an Indian therefore feels especially close and who can understand him independently from the Christ presented by Western Christians who were in the country as rulers.

The affinity to Christ and his moral teaching can be seen through the following decennia. Ramakrishna Paramahansa speaks of a vision in which a person whom he recognized as Christ merged into him. Gandhiji acknowledged the influence of the Sermon on the Mount on him and on the formation of his strategy of *satyagraha*. His friend C.F. Andrews, Stanley Jones (founder of the Sat-Tal Ashram near Bhimtal) and others, would enrich and complete this understanding. The open acknowledgement of the influence of Christ is not seen to be the same everywhere in the country. In Western India the influence of Christianity is more indirect and is the inspiration to social attitudes. It is known that during the meetings of the Prarthana Samaj which prompted socio-religious reform in Maharashtra, passages from the writings of A.C. Fraser, a Christian writer, were read out. Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, one of the most radical Hindu reformers, had close contacts with persons such as Rev. M. Mitchwel. Dr. Dondo Keshav Karve, a pioneer of women's education in India, who was instrumental in bringing about the first women's university in the country, acknowledged the inspiration of Pandita Ramabai in his work for the uplift of women. Pandita Ramabai was a Christian and one of the greatest women reformers in India and the only woman in history who translated single-handedly the whole Bible into a new language, namely, into Marathi. Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak, the leader in the national liberation movement before Gandhiji, in his letter of resignation from the Deccan Education Society, referred to the ideal of the



“Hindu Jesuit” which had inspired that whole band of dedicated educators. Gopal Krishna Gokhale, the ‘Prince of Liberalism in India’ and later the political guru of M.K. Gandhi, while founding the Servants of India Society, was influenced by the ideals of the Jesuits. Many more references can be given of Christian inspiration in initiatives of various forms of liberating efforts. In Gandhiji, the inspiration of the more Bengal and of the more Maharashtrian type are visible. One may dare say that Hindus themselves have discovered the person and the teachings of Christ and that they see in this discovery a precious help in the building up of modern India. Christ has become a concern for modern India, a national concern.

Out of such an attitude to Christ and his moral teaching grew the attitude to Christ at Santiniketan. And it also explains why it was possible that in modern times painting of Christian themes in Indian style began at Santiniketan and was started by non-Christians. What had already happened at the Moghul court happened again. At Santiniketan, “under E.B. Havell’s influence the Tagores (Abhanindranath and the poet Rabindranath) together with Nandalal Bose, their cousin and an excellent painter, tried to link up with the Mughal tradition, sometimes experimenting with techniques borrowed from the West or from China”. (Mario Bussagli and Calembus Sivaramamurti, *op. cit.* p. 306) with regard to these techniques there was the same open spirit at Santiniketan, which characterized the open attitude towards Christianity.

Though Christ and his teaching found appreciation in the artists’ group at Santiniketan, his was not the main inspiration. The volume *Drawings and Paintings of Rabindranath Tagore*, (Lalit Kala Academy, New Delhi, 1961) does not portray any Christian themes. Neither do the volumes of the small Lalit Kala Academy series of the Santiniketan-related artists (Devi Prasad Roy Chowdhary, Binode Behari Mukherjee, Kshitindranath Mujumder and Gaganendranath Tagore) show any Christian motif: at least, the selections in the publications do not include any. This means that these motifs were not regarded as very important. Still it is a fact “that for several decâdes ending sometime in the 1960s almost every Indian painter of note painted pictures of Jesus”. (R.W. Taylor, *Jesus in Indian Painting*, 1975, p. 56). Abhanindranath Tagore, a cousin of Ravindranath Tagore and founder of the Bengal School of Art, painted several pictures of Christ. Prince

Dwarkanath Tagore (1794-1846) was the grandfather, and Deven-dranath Tagore (1817-1905) the father of Ravindranath, while Abanindranath (1871) was related through Gunendranath (1847-1881) and Girindranath (1820-1854) to Dwarkanath as his great-grandfather. Richard W. Taylor observes that all the paintings of Christ depicted by Nandalal Bose, a well-known artist at Santiniketan, show the cross, and that two versions of Christ carrying the Cross were painted in 1945 when Gandhiji stayed at Santiniketan and had long discussion with him. Gandhiji saw the suffering of Christ as full of meaning. He was greatly attracted to the crucified Christ wearing only a loin-cloth. (R.W. Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 63).

Jamini Roy (1887-1972) in reaction to both western-inspired styles and to the Bengal School (of Santiniketan) left the "city culture" and returned to "village folk art". There was something in him which led to the defiance which so characterises the Bengali extremist movement. From 1925 to 1931 he concentrated on Santal tribal themes and then from 1937 to 1940 he concentrated on the Christ theme. Later in 1943 he told Mary Mildord, "I am not a Christian... Christ is a great theme and I shall continue to struggle to find a fitting expression in modern times". For him Christ was indifferent to suffering; he had courage and honesty, he lived poor and battled against structures and so he became a symbol for the fight for freedom—in spite of being worshipped by the British rulers. Jamini Roy was the first great Indian artist who *turned to the Christ theme in a persistent manner* presenting it forcefully in modern Indian painting as a gesture of protest against the city, western influence and a feeble imitation of India's past. He connected this theme with the villagers, the tribals and their culture. From now on Christ as a protest even against Indian traditions would not disappear again from modern Indian painting. Jamini Roy was a master. Masao Takenaka's excellent book *Christian Art in Asia* (Kyoto, 1975) has as cover picture Jamini Roy's Last Supper.

It must also be observed that Roy's Christian themes do not differ much in their style from other themes such as Vaishnavite Women Figures, Boatmen, Three Women, etc. But this very fact indicates a double dimension: by choosing new themes and subjects like the Santal tribals or Christian themes he opened a whole new art medium to new themes and loosened the connection of this



medium with a specific cultural context. By introducing new themes he acknowledged them to be capable of carrying a message using this specific cultural medium. One is reminded here of Ravindranath Tagore. He loosened the connection of Bengali religious poetry with traditional mythology and made it possible that his compositions received a larger acceptance. The national anthem of Muslim Bangla Desh are his words; and in Christian worship, hymns from his *Gitanjali* have become favourites. Turning to new themes can be done in double way. One may preserve the form, as Jamini Roy has done, or one may change the form to indicate the newness of the theme.

In the course of time various schools of painting developed in the country. Christian themes among others were taken up by artists of other religions; but none was so persistent in his choice as Jamini Roy. If one collected originals with Christian themes, one would get a considerable number of paintings. Nevertheless compared with the total artistic output in India, they are a relatively small number. The article "Chiaroscuro" by A.S.R. (*Illustrated Weekly of India*, 1962, August 5, p. 13) would therefore refer not primarily to the quantity of such paintings, but to the way they are presented—as a critique of society and of tradition, offering in this way an element of contrast. The word "chiaroscuro" is derived from the Latin words *clarum*, clear, and *obscurum*, obscure, and indicates a type of painting using light and shade in order to indicate a third dimension.

Among the subjects taken up by non-Christian artists one notices works depicting aspects of the life of the Christian community. Shiavax Chawda, born 1914, has paintings such as Cross Maidan (in Bombay), Death of Pope Pius XII. Laxman Pai, a Goan, painted Christian Women and Good Friday. There exist many paintings which illustrate events from the life of Christ. Often they are rendered in such a manner as to show how the event would have appeared had Christ lived in India. S.Y. Malak, a Muslim, born 1899, who worked later at Nagpur, speaking about himself, wrote that he paints "pictures in oriental (Indian) as well as academic styles, using water-colours, oils and pastels as medium". (Cf. Arno Lehman, *Afroasiatische Christliche Kunst*, Berlin, 1966, p. 271). In his picture, The Good Samaritan, the figures appear rather traditionally Indian, the wounded man mounted on a donkey



wears only a dhoti. The Samaritan, being of a different community, wears Muslim dress. A picture "Ye are the Light of the World" was painted for a competition at Edinburgh, 1959, for a cover design for the Gospel of St. John. The cover shows Christ with a shepherd's staff and the Bible in his hand. The symbolism of the picture is somewhat farfetched: white dhoti (purity), light blue shawl (antidote to the world's sins), shepherd's staff (authority to lead the masses of humanity), differently coloured ribbons fixed to the staff (Trinity—white for the Father, red for the Son, blue for the Holy Spirit), peacock feather (medicine against snake bite), red turbans (purity, love, simplicity), and red cover of the book (blood from the heart of Jesus). Christ is the light; those who follow him too bring light (Cf. *ibid.*, p. 271).

Arup Das, born 1927, is Bengali and Hindu. He has several pictures with Christian themes. R.W. Taylor writes that Arup Das regards himself as deeply Hindu and a mystic. He sees visions of Christ, and out of this *anubhava* he paints his Christ pictures, a good number of them on the crucifixion theme. The agony of Christ is for him "unparalleled", "transcendent". For him it stands for the agony of man, of miserable man. For Arup Das the Christ of his vision is but another name for Krishna or Shiva. (Cf. R.W. Taylor, *op. cit.*, pp. 81-6). The picture by Arup Das, presented by A. Lehman, shows elongated figures, the lines in some way move towards the centre; human feelings and passion are not merely portrayed, but passion overcome is shown in a resultant state of peace. Christ has already "overcome".

Already with Arup Das, the theme of the crucifixion is dominant. This theme is a recurring one in the paintings of non-Christians. It belongs to the core of Christian Faith, that God became man, real man, sharing his suffering unto death, experiencing the agony and total rejectedness of man. His becoming man in Jesus is not "as if", is not illusion or *maya*. But this passion and death are not the end; they become meaningful through the resurrection; the overcoming of death through life. Death and resurrection belong together.

K.C.S. Panikar, born 1911, who has been since 1952 Principal of the Madras Art School, founded after his retirement Choramandal, an artists' village outside Madras. To the question

why he painted so many pictures of Christ he said, "I have been attracted by the agony of Christ. We talk about love and peace. We meditate and fast with great austerities. But we are not involved in physical agony. Yet in Christ I meet the man who manifested love by shedding his own blood". (Masao Takenaka, *op. cit.*, p. 27). Another word of his is that if one scratches Buddha there appears a highborn prince; if one scratches Christ, one finds a simple carpenter's son, something genuine. (R.W. Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 73). K.C.S. Panikar painted 'The Scourged Christ'. He also prepared a sculpture 'Sorrow of Christ'. Real human suffering does not fit into the classical canon of Indian painting which does not accommodate what is distorted, ugly and disproportionate. *Upamitibhavaprapanchakatha*, a prose allegorical romance, 10th century, by the Jain, Siddharshi, speaks of a good picture as follows "Here is a fine drawing delicately drawn in an obtrusive line, coloured gay in bright colours, with relief suggested by modelling, with the element of ornamentation appropriately introduced, symmetrical portrayal of body, emotion and joy, executed in a really admirable manner". (See C. Sivaramamurti, *Indian Painting*, New Delhi, 1970, p. 20).

Real suffering and misery will more easily be found in non-classical forms of art, or as is the case in many modern painters, they will express their new content through new, non-conventional forms of painting. Krishna Hawlaji Ara contributed to the exhibition shown together with the Heras Memorial Lectures, 1985, at Bombay, a monumental painting on the Crucifixion of Christ. Presenting this picture, the 71-year old painter said, "There is no other theme capable of expressing suffering as the passion of Christ." This has been said by an artist who does not stress suffering much, and so the statement means the more. R. Von Leyden writes, "There is no struggle with fate in Ara's painting, no solving of problems; just the pleasure and the pride of painting as a self-sufficient act of life, and as a childhood dream come true." (Lalit Kala Akademi, Ara, New Delhi, 1965, p. 5).

K.C.S. Panikar also touched subjects dear to India in relation to the message of Christ: 'Woman Taken in Adultery' shows his merciful love; 'Blessed are the Peacemakers' depicts Christ in the company of two other great promoters of peace, Buddha and Gandhiji.

Pictures referring to cruelty and meaninglessness of torture and





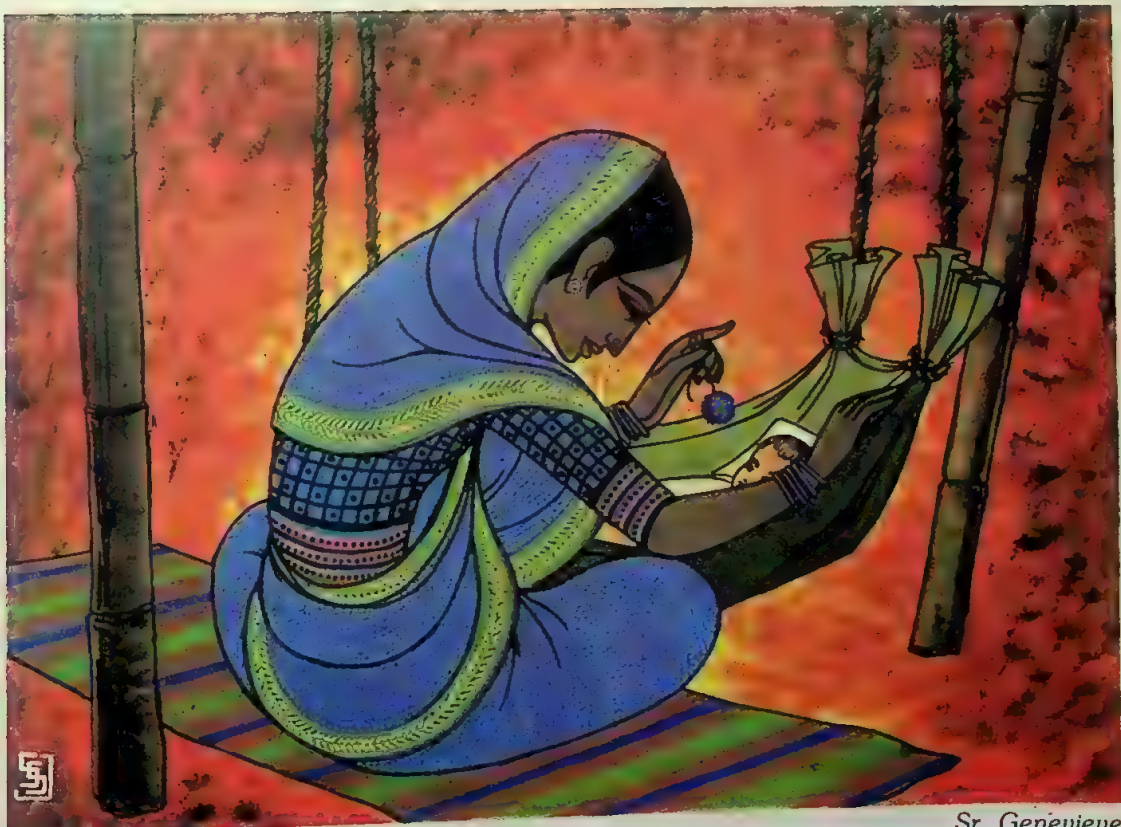
The Forgiveness of Sins.

Sr. Genevieve



The Lord is in your midst.

Sr. Genevieve



A Babe is born.

Sr. Genevieve





Our Holy Saviour's Birth.

Sr. Claire



At the Temple Gate.

Sr. Claire

death and the triumph and joy of the resurrection have been painted by many: Satish Gujral, Asit Kumar Haldar, A.N. Narayan, Jehangir Sabavala, A.M. Davierwalla, Nikhil Biswas, Kanwal Krishna, Krishna Khanna and others. In 1980 Krishna Khanna exhibited thirteen pictures in Delhi on the passion and resurrection of Christ. K.C.S. Panikar has paintings on another theme, namely Genesis. This theme has often been taken up by non-Christian artists. Hinduism is closely connected with the rhythm of nature. Many of its feasts and celebrations follow the cycle of the moon or the seasons. They relate to the events of human life—of birth and death. There is an awareness of the myth of origin, continuation and destruction of even the whole of the cosmos along with its gods. No wonder then, that the theme of origin, birth, genesis attracts attention. In this, one can recognize also the modern desire to relate rather to the beginning with its growth than to see oneself in a descending phase of a recurring cycle of creation and destruction. As regards the painting 'Genesis' of Panikar, a Lalit Kala Academy publication mentions that in the best Indian tradition no part of motherhood is unseemly. About his well-known picture Two Figures, a kneeling nude black mother and a black child on a red background looking at each other, the author said that this picture though not having any particular Christian theme was very 'Christian'. Did he mean by this the attitude of mutual respect and caring between the two figures? It is often that pictures that do not have any reference to a particular religion, that do not have, so to say, a 'label', witness very powerfully to the spirit of a religion.

The Madonna with the Christ Child too is a theme painted by non-Christian artists, e.g. Mother and Child by G.K. Hajarathbai, Belgaum. The theme mother and child is a very human, deeply moving one. But as it is more easily found also in a secular context and again in the context of any religion, non-Christian artists did at times not feel so much the need to refer it directly to Christianity. The Madonna-Child motif enabled them to portray an intense, pure, selfless and human mother-child relationship without the need of referring it to some of the traditional Mother Goddess aspects directed to fertility, destructiveness and ferocity or to mark it off from them.

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Maqbool Fida Husain (born 1915) at present represents Indian painting as no one else. Besides the many other motives influencing

his artistic work, recently he prepared a series of paintings on Mother Theresa. She has become a symbol for many, of mercy and selfless love for the unwanted, the unprotected, the unloved, orphan children and the old without strength or hope. The paintings are one diptych, two triptychs, one single painting and 10 lithographs. On the pictures Mother Theresa is shown without a face. One painting has two such faceless faces, two have three such faces. Love is given not as a personal favour, it is selfless and in this sense without 'face'. If several such selfless persons exist, the poor can approach any of them. The white sari with the blue border envelops the needy child, allows it to hide and feel protected; it also covers the naked. The pictures show also the language of the hand, children's hands reaching out to hold, hands bent by sickness and the large helping hands marked by labour and toil. The series of pictures could be entitled the merciful Love of Service. They are so deeply human and uncompromisingly direct.

Christian themes have been taken up by non-Christian painters right from the time of the Bengal School. Looking at Christian themes through Indian eyes has been one of the approaches of such pictures, especially when it was a question of a more "realistic" presentation. The majority of later pictures are not concerned with a realistic presentation whether semitic or Indian, but rather with presenting a content, an inner experience, a felt meaning which becomes visible through the symbols and events taken from the Christian tradition. There seems to be a readiness to relate in a special way to Christ as one among us humans, representing love, uncompromising sacrifice and final meaningfulness in spite of all struggle and agony and victory. A *sahabhojan*, a shared meal of all, (the Last Supper) the repenting sinner and God's love (the Prodigal Son, the Woman taken in Adultery), serving all men (the Good Samaritan), the Christ Child and his Mother, origin and creation, are some of the more common themes. They relate to themes such as suffering, death and life, love, forgiveness and peace, service, human concern and equality. Considering the pictures one recognises that it is taken for granted that there is a 'Christ of the Indian Road' using the title of a book by Stanley Jones, and that he belongs to the East and the West.

However, how does this portraying of Christian themes relate to other parts of the world? De facto, it is an all-Asia concern



(Masao Takenaka, *Christian Art in Asia*, Kyoto, 1975), an Asian-African concern (Arno Lehmann, *Christian Art in Asia and Africa*, St. Louis, 1969), an Asian-Central and South American concern (John E. Butler, *Christianity in Asia and Africa after AD 1500*, Leiden, 1979), as also a Western concern (Guenther Rombold, Horst Schwebel, *Christus in der Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Freiburg, 1983). As art schools in India closely observe what is going on in art circles in the west and allow themselves to be influenced by movements and trends there, the development of the Christ theme there is not without repercussion in India.

In a general way one may sum up, and it is an interesting point to note, that in the painting of Christian themes in India non-Christian artists have chosen these more as a critique of their own society or to emphasize aspects dormant in Indian society. For Christian artists, painting in Indian style is a means to integrate themselves into the mainstream of Indian culture; it is an aspect of inculturation either in cultural traditions or into the present day cultural context.

### *Christian Artists In India*

Just fifty years ago religious paintings in Christian churches, homes and institutions were practically completely in Western style. Some were of good quality, but pictures in the pseudo-praphaelite style, insipid, sweet and harmless, were common and well-accepted. In the West in recent years initiatives have started to reestablish dynamic contacts between creative painting and religiosity. Can one observe something similar in India?

Christianity goes back to an historic event, to a founder who lived in a specific time in a specific country, who ate the food of his region, spoke the language of his people, was inter-woven into the total human context. When the question came up of whether Christ should be painted in Indian style as regards colour of skin, hair, dress, etc., some felt by so doing one would betray the historic roots of this religion. Would one, for example, paint Alexander in the dress of an Indian warrior? Or would a Hindu who goes to the West portray Krishna, Shiva in Western dress?

The question is not so irrelevant. Christ for Christians is not only a human person; he is the object of their devotion and adora-



tion. But again this is exactly the reason why presentations of Christ through the centuries have been adapted to various cultures and trends and as gifted artists saw him in their intuition. Christians were not only and not primarily concerned with the Jesus of History but about the Christ of their Faith. It is the Christ through whom they pray and whom they know present in their hearts. Besides art has never been a photographic presentation of an event. As there grew a deepened awareness that the roots of the Christian people are their own respective country, whether in Asia, Africa or any other continent, and a conscious identification with the whole of the respective country, this would show itself also in art.

With the end of the First World War and the strengthening of national movements in the then colonial areas, a new initiative took place. It was deeply felt that the Christian community in each country should have its own spiritual leadership; it should be rooted in its respective land. Also C. Constantini, later Cardinal, already as Apostolic Delegate in China worked to make the church in China Chinese. His initiatives in the twenties of this century were instrumental in encouraging initiatives in Christian art in Asia and Africa. Examples of other church leaders working in the same direction can be given. Two main factors helped the promotion of Indian Christian art by Christians—Santiniketan and Gandhiji. The first group of Christian artists were all connected with Santiniketan. Around 1930 several young artistically gifted Indian Christians were attuned to the stirring of the movement towards socio-political liberation in the country, so powerfully promoted by Gandhiji, and they were encouraged to identify themselves with the artistic traditions of the country. Modern Indian painting therefore links up with the cultural renewal of Santiniketan and it happened in the wider context of the Gandhian socio-political movements of liberation. At about the same time that Christians started to paint in Indian style, the first Christian ashrams were founded.

Important Christian artists who belong to the first group of Christian artists were Alfred D. Thomas, a Methodist from North India, Vinayak S. Masoji, a Presbyterian from Kolhapur and Angelo da Fonseca, a Catholic of Goa who settled in Pune. All three turned to painting Christian themes in Indian style at about the same time. Alfred D. Thomas studied art at Lucknow under Bireshwar Sen, who came from Santiniketan. In painting Christian figures A.D.

Thomas was influenced by the classical canon of painting. His Christ has broad shoulders and narrow hips: the classical form of a lion and of the male human body. The women he paints are mild and soft, well-proportioned like the female figures of the classical era. He wanted his figures to be beautiful and eminent, like high-caste persons. Only later would artists ask themselves whether Christ should really look like a Brahmin or a Buddhist prince. Is he not equally near or nearer to the rural proletariat, the oppressed and the marginal? The question would then be raised whether the canon of classical painting should be the ideal for Indian Christian painting, whether it should be its taking-off point, or other forms of art, related more with the poor, especially also as the majority of Christians have come from the poorer groups in society.

Vinayak S. Masoji (1897-1978) went to Santiniketan where he became teacher and later principal of its Kala Bhavan. He painted in the style of the School of Bengal. He lived in close proximity to one of the leading cultural personalities of his time, Ravindranath Tagore. The artists at Santiniketan have achieved much, though their efforts to bring together inspiration from India, the Far East and Europe remained incomplete. Masoji painted most of his Christian pictures late in life after his retirement.

Angelo da Fonseca (1910-1967) is the most influential and important painter of the first generation. It will remain his secret why he gave up his medical studies and turned to art, first at the J.J. School of Art Bombay and then at Santiniketan under Abhanindranath Tagore and Nandalal Bose. Abhanindranath taught him the so-called wash technique. In this technique the paper is dipped into differently coloured waters; also after applying colour the picture is again dipped into water. The colours in the painting take on a soft and even hue, suggesting peace and harmony. The works of Angelo da Fonseca have a quiet, subdued depth which leads to meditation. Da Fonseca was a master of the line. His clear strong lines harmonically arranged lead up to the centre of the picture. One can recognize in his pictures an influence of the pre-Raphaelite school and even the stern classical style of the Benedictine abbey of Beuron, Germany. He avoided the shallowness of the later pre-Raphaelite style and the appearance of lifelessness of the Beuron style. In the course of the years, he developed his own mature style. Da Fonseca was a deeply religious person. He knew the Bible,



Catholic devotional traditions and also Hindu traditions. He wanted to inspire to *bhakti*, devotion, therefore throughout his life he worked at creating types for devotional representations, such as the Sacred Heart, Christ the Guru, Christ the King, Madonna and Christ Child, Christ on the Cross, the Risen Christ, various saints, etc. Even today when Christians buy religious pictures, they prefer motifs which inspire devotion; they prefer them to illustrations of biblical events. The majority of his pictures as of other Christian artists, too, were about the incarnation and the redemption, Christmas and Good Friday, Easter, which are also the main events in Christ's life in the Christian creed.

Angelo da Fonseca lived for a long time in the then Anglican Khrista Prema Seva Ashram, Pune, and also after his marriage he had his studio there. He was an ecumenical person, open to all Christians and open to all religions. He was a quiet person who loved his garden, the rugged countryside of Maharashtra, Goan cooking, the people. He went to the old bazaar to find utensils which could be used in church services. He wanted Christian art to be deeply rooted in the Indian soil. After years of quiet sustained work he could write, "Our efforts to create a school of Indian Christian art have been blessed by the Lord. The greatest optimist among us could never have expected what could be achieved." When he was about to leave Santiniketan, Abhanindranath Tagore wrote on his masterwork, a painting, "Young man, go out and paint churches." Da Fonseca worked all through his life to come closer to this ideal.

Closely connected with the pioneering generation were Frank Wesley, Angela Trindade and S.S. Bandellu. Frank Wesley, a student under Bireshwar Sen at Lucknow, had the ability to work in a variety of styles and to achieve excellence in each. In his 'Blue Madonna' the lines, the colours and the light all move toward the head of the baby. Another picture, the 'Black Madonna', shows Mary as a member of people of low origin, black like the goddess Kali, sharply contrasted with the bright red sari indicating sacrifice and a light golden background meaning glory. Again another picture 'Before Abraham was, I AM' shows the Babe in Mary's lap seated on clouds. Mary has the classical Indian female form, harmonious face, large round breasts, and slender hips, her femininity being much more shown than usually in Christian painting.



Another person who followed the classical ideal was Angela Trindade, daughter of a famous artist in Western style in Bombay. "Why should I not portray Mary as a really womanly beautiful woman?" she once told me. After she had what she regarded as a deep experience of the Trinity, she painted only in triangles. She was too great a master not to create beautiful pictures in this style also.

S.S. Bandellu, also from Bombay, would see an ideal, to preach the Gospel through Christian painting. As regards a painting of his in the book, *Christian Art in India*, published by the Commission on Christian Literature of the Methodist Church in South Asia, Lucknow, 1956, he reminds us that Christ is a Jew and that his Jewishness be made visible in his paintings. He would not agree that Christ could be represented like a Hindu holy man or like a Buddhist monk. This position differs from the one taken by many artists in India asking how would Christ look if he walked our roads. Such a question loses much of its relevance regarding the depiction of externals if an artist does not relate primarily to an Indian style in his work, but to his Indian experience searching for expressions within the wider Indian context of today.

Among the most popular Christian artists are two religious Sisters, both based in Bangalore. Sr. Genevieve is originally French and did her art studies in France. She has been very productive and has prepared a whole series on the Old Testament for the use of religious instruction of Christian peoples. She has also prepared a life of Christ in many pictures. At present she works at Indore on a series of 150 pictures presenting the Christian faith. She has also painted pictures for chapels and churches, in oils on wooden planks. Her paintings have been the most popular ones among Christians from among Christian painters. In recent years she has made intensive studies of the symbolism of signs and colours in Hindu tradition. She warns that symbols have a definite meaning and as people see in them more than just a picture one should not so easily reinterpret them. As the seed has to die to give new life so a symbol has to be taken out of its old frame so that it can get a new meaning. At present she does not paint in 'Indian style'. She explains this through her understanding of the meaning of symbols used in Hinduism. She sees in many of them a tantric, erotic meaning, not suitable for the use in religious Christian pictures. Without

doubt, many symbols in a long history have also gone through a tantric interpretation, and even of a crude tantric interpretation. But then, one may answer that this is not the only one.

Sr. Genevieve says, further, that Hinduism being a living religion, has symbols which for its adherents have a definite 'sacramental' meaning implying spiritual divine energy. To explain this the symbol OM may be used; it is primarily a sound, a *mantra*; but it is used also as a presentation, *yantra*. OM or OAM contains deep-sounding vowels; if one considers consonants as interruptions only of vowels one understands why this syllable is considered as the sum and total of all sounds. Further it is said that the whole of the universe vibrates in its sound, so it is used for the beginning and the end of religious chant and in meditation and that it is considered to bring about union with *Brahman*, the final ground of all being. In this sense the sound OM is seen not only as a psychological means for reaching interiority but as a power to bring about realisation. This applies both to its audible form as a *mantra* and its visible form as a *yantra*. There have been many speculations about OM and even a great friend of the Hindu tradition such as F. Max Mueller warns, that many of the speculations on OM of his days were for him "mere twaddle". (F.M. Mueller, *Vedanta Philosophy*, III, 3, Sunil Gupta, Calcutta, 1955, p. 63). One can understand that someone points out that symbols such as OM have traditionally definite meanings and significances and they should not be used in such a way that people from whose cultural context they have risen feel provoked. On the other hand many symbols do allow a variety of interpretations; they can become meaningful for anyone who is attuned to its wider cultural context and who sees in the expressions of this culture positive and God-inspired values.

Sr. Claire originally comes from Andhra Pradesh. Like Sr. Genevieve she was first drawing teacher in a high school; now both are completely free for their artistic work. Sr. Claire may have children in mind when she paints; her pictures are refreshing, joyful, simple, harmonious and Indian through and through. There is much of garlands, dancing and celebrating in her pictures. Her saints have no halo. "Is not the whole of life penetrated by God? Why then a special sign signifying the belonging to him," she would explain. She receives many requests for pictures. On many of her pictures, for example on her Christmas cards, women abound, while



normally in such pictures mainly men are to be seen. It quite fits in with the Indian scene, for if a child were born in a stable of a woman on a journey, there would be not only men around. Women would come to bring a light, oil and fruits and flowers. And children too would be present, curious and wide-eyed.

The work of a Christian artist is not without special problems. She/he will have to stand up to the critique of the art expert and of the theologian and she/he has also to please the people for whom the painting is meant. Besides a painter has to commit herself/himself. In a picture an idea receives a definite form and shape; it has to become visible to the eye. The art creations make it easily perceptible where the artist stands as regards her/his attitude towards the cultural context of India's ancient traditions, Christian faith and non-Christian religions.

In recent years the number of Christian artists in India is increasing. An exhibition 'Art for Peace' at Bombay in the Christmas week 1984 organised by the Indian Christian Art Association showed that a great step forward has been taken. This was shown in the variety of pictures and the maturity of their presentations. Let me mention here a rebel. Francis Newton Souza and then add some of the present-day Christian artists.

Francis Newton Souza, born 1924 in Goa into a Catholic family, has been called the most gifted artist of Christian origin in India. It is a loss for the Christian community in India that it could not hold him within its frame of belief. Geeta Kapur writes about him, "That Souza belongs to the category of the rebel is evident from the themes and style of his paintings and from his personal behaviour. Flaming and raging through the years, he has succeeded in presenting himself as the Fallen Angel driven from the Kingdom of God, as Lucifer avenging himself by rendering the veil of sublimity". (Geeta Kapur, *Contemporary Indian Artists*, p. 38).

Souza initiated the 'Progressive Artists Group' at Bombay in 1947. He was the first who left it to go abroad. After a time of poverty and hardship he achieved recognition and fame. He had turned to Marxism and then away from it on his tempestuous journey. For him suffering is nothing noble; in his attitude to religion he follows Nietzsche. Still he drew inspiration again and again from the themes of his childhood religion. Geeta Kapur writes, "It is not



surprising, therefore, that in his famous Crucifixion (1959) he turns Christ into a caricature.... He has painted many versions of Christ, not all of them so bitterly contemptuous, and the famous painting of the Deposition (1964) is not without a tragic content. Characteristically, however, Souza treats even tragedy in his own way, permitting no element of grace to enter the horrifying drama of Christ's death". (*Ibid.*, pp. 17-18). A recent display of his paintings in Bombay shows that this "most volatile among Indian artists, with the most fierce impulse," (*Ibid.*, p. 45) is still as vulgar and mercilessly provocative as ever.

A. Alphonso is a staff member of the Government College of Arts and Crafts, Madras. I met him for the first time when he held an exhibition at the Taj Mahal Hotel, Bombay. He will not be out of place even in a five-star hotel exhibition hall; this is also the problem when it comes to a question of relating to the common people. We do not have a common artistic form which appeals to the common devout church goer and the cultural elite. Alphonso had K.C.S. Panikar as his teacher. "I suppose," writes R.W. Taylor, "that as modern painters who are Hindus experiment with tantric or temple or daily themes, it seems reasonable for those who are Christian to experiment with biblical themes." (R.W. Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 165). Alphonso has chosen an evolved, bronze relief type of presentation. He says, "I have always thought of Jesus as a person of Eastern origin. He was a Jew, an Asian. I have invariably conceived of Jesus as a bronze figure that comes naturally to me, and then I add other colours—maroon, orange, deep orange, yellow and even black to suit my composition". (*Image, Christ and Art in Asia*, XVII, Sep. 1983, p. 3). The paintings of A. Alphonso are a pointer that Indian Christian art also has to find its place also in academic artistic circles.

John E. Butler (*Christianity in Asia and America after AD 1500*, p. 13) writes about Jyoti Sahi, a well-known Christian artist, "Perhaps the most hopeful of the experiments is the work of Jyoti Sahi who is seeking across a semi-abstract Western technique, to practice an aesthetic based on the *shilpashastras*, whereby art is more a sacrament working through correct forms and formulae than the personal expressions of 'beauty' or 'ego'." Jyoti Sahi is a bridge builder between cultures; his father is Punjabi, his mother is English. Now he lives with his wife and four children in a village

outside Bangalore. He is an accomplished writer and is able to communicate well through the spoken and written work, explaining his paintings. In a booklet of his *And the Word became Flesh* (Art India, Pune, 1978) he presents twenty paintings, being meditations on the Gospel of St. John. The first painting shows the Annunciation to Mary that she would become the mother of God. The spirit of God is represented in the form of OM, indicating a relevance of it for Hindu traditions; the curved line on the letter OM is like the moon indicating the Muslim religion. Mary with the child in her lap is like a bent over branch of olive, signifying new life. The whole is on the background. An oval in the centre of the picture signifies the egg of the universe. One has the feeling that all the various elements fuse together easily and organically. The last picture of the book shows the resurrection, showing Christ as the 'Lord of the Dance', 'Nataraja', 'Tandava', the 'Transgressor', stepping through walls and divisions created by man's fears. Here the resurrection is linked up with the Hindu concept of Nataraja.

Jyoti Sahi recognises that traditional symbols have been reinterpreted in the course of time and that they are open to new interpretations. A Christian Indian artist will express himself also through such re-interpreted symbols. Jyoti Sahi regards himself as much even more a writer-poet than an artist-painter; he can be very articulate and inspiring in presenting ideas with regard to Indian traditions and Christian faith, ancient symbols and a present-day context, East and West. In some of his pictures there remains a restlessness in the attempt to fuse these elements together; the best ones achieve a marvelous unity. In him the Christian artist has become a recognised partner in the dialogue within the Christian churches as regards their Indian Christian identity.

Indian Christian art owes much to the Santiniketan ashram, where art in modern India began to renew itself in the context of an ashram and within the general humanism this renewal implied. Cholomandal has helped South Indian artists. At present, Jyoti Sahi and some friends of his have established an artists' ashram near Bangalore called the Indian School of Art for Peace. It provides an atmosphere for artists to work creatively, for young persons to test their abilities and to endeavour that art may be combined with life and that the venture of promoting Christian painting in India may advance. Besides it should be a place where art work



becomes a *sadhana*, a means to more interiority and where art is linking up with the ashram idea, one of the charisms for the renewal of the life of the Christian community in India.

In a recent painting by Jyoti Sahi, Christ is presented as a poor man among poor landless labourers. This is part of the contextualisation of Christian art; in it there is place for inspiration from classical tradition; in it there is also place for linking up with the masses and the poor. In this art the ideal will not be that of the cultural elite. In the cultural efforts by Christians there will be a double dimension, to be open to the cultural traditions of the elite and at the same time also to recognize their limitations, and not to hesitate to rejoice with the masses in their songs, dances, festivals and paintings.

Solomon Chandravan Chavan is the Principal of the Beynon-Smith School of Art, Belgaum, Karnataka. He has inspired several young persons to express themselves through art. In his picture 'Christ and the Worker' Christ is shown as a coolie, lifting a container filled with mud onto the head of a working girl. A group of artists from Bangalore, John Devaraj among them, take their art to the street. They wish to make passers-by aware of social injustice in society and thus become leaven for social renewal.

### *Christian Painting In India Today*

The presentation of Christian themes has to be seen from a two-fold perspective: the presentation of these themes through the centuries and their presentation in our own time in the various cultures of Asia. In following up the presentation of these themes through the centuries we restrict ourselves here to the presentation of Christ, the central focus of Christian paintings. In the course of the two millenia, the presentation of Christ in the West went through several phases. Early Christianity, once the Jewish-inherited reluctance to present Christ in painting and sculpture was overcome, depicted him in the form of the youthful god, Apollo, as youthfulness was considered a part of divinity and immortality. In the third and fourth centuries, figures of the Good Shepherd with his sheep, Saviour and saved, became popular. Beginning with the outgoing Roman empire, now officially Christian, Christ was portrayed as the *Pantokrator*, the King of Kings. It seems that the



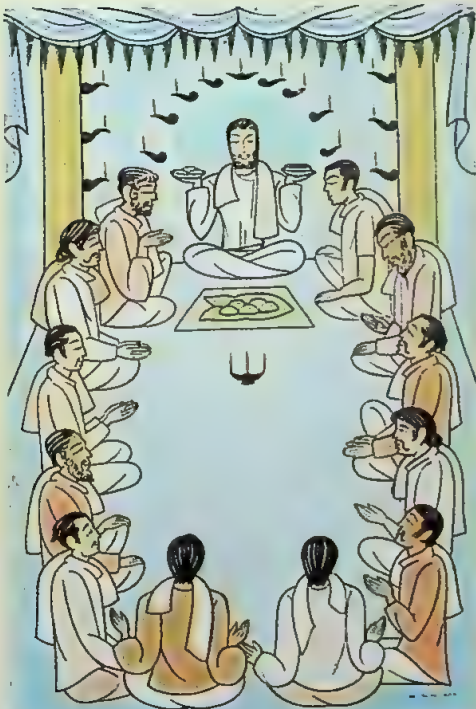


Full of Grace.

Sr. Claire



They rejoice in your presence. Sr. Claire



The Mystery of Faith.

Sr. Claire



My Spirit excels in God.

Sr. Claire



Born of a Woman.

C.J. Anthony Doss



Flight into Egypt.

A.P. Charles Raj





Indian Christmas.

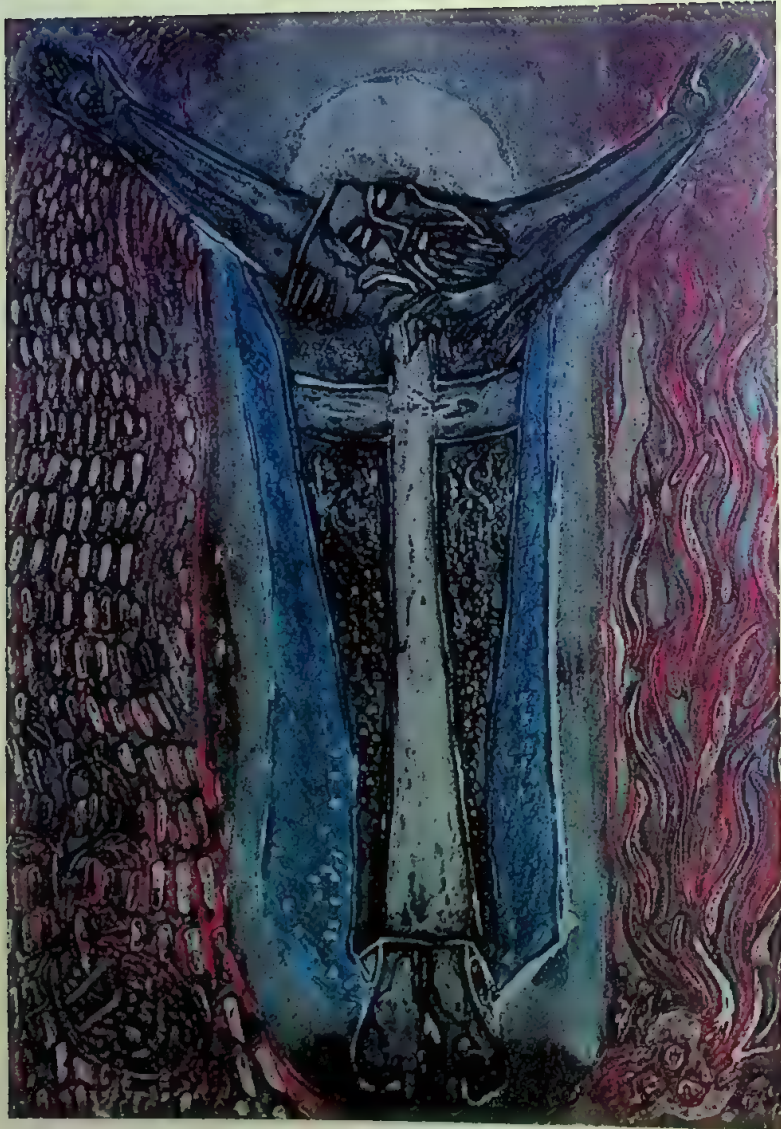
*Lemuel Patole*



Rajasthani Nativity.

*Paul Koli*





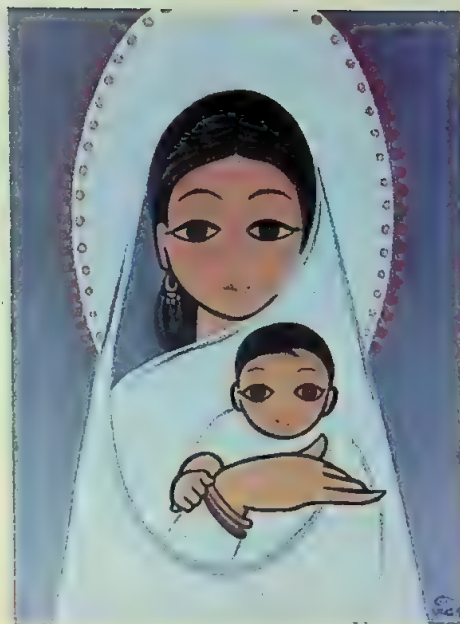
Crucifixion.

*Isenth P.W.*



Go out with joy.

K.J. Barse



Cause of our joy.

Vic Afonso



At your feet.

Swami Vikrant



The Lord is our strength. P. Solomon Raj.





Divine Teacher.

A. Alphonso



My God and my Lord.

Dheeraj Sabu



At the foot of the cross.

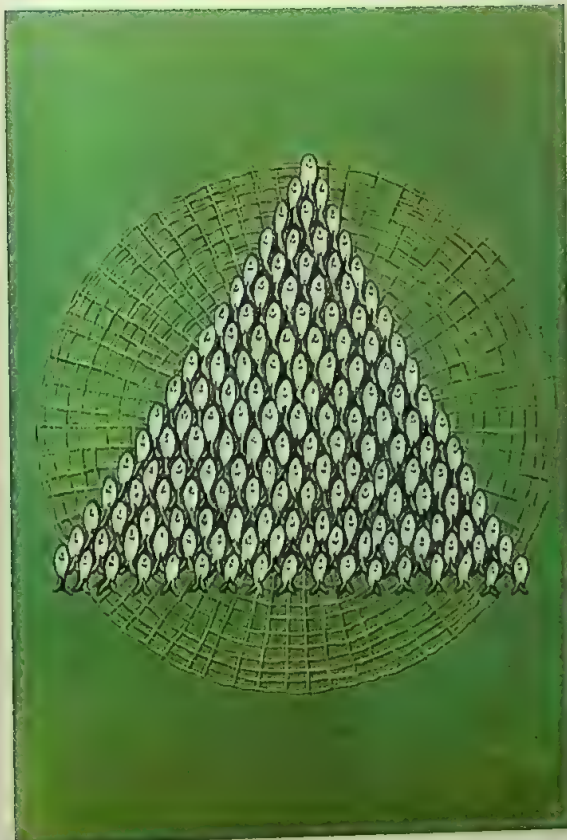
C.J. Anthony Doss





Holy Trinity

Jyoti Sahi



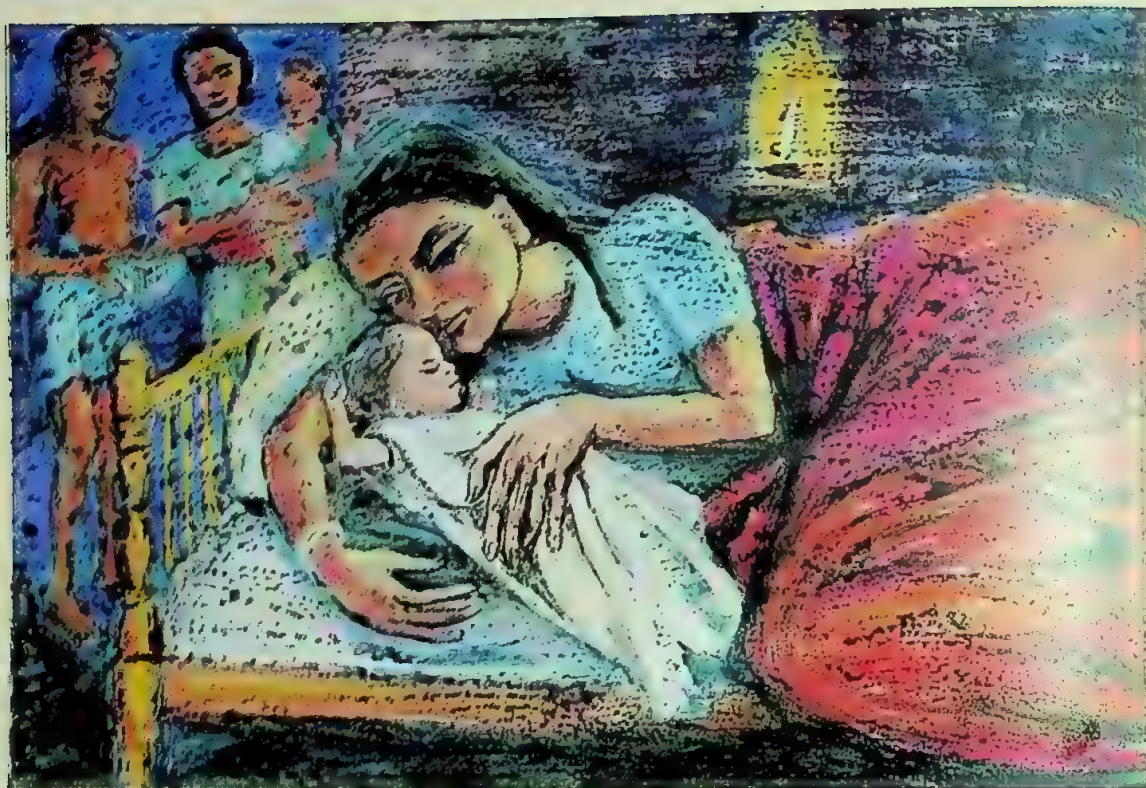
It is the Lord.

Jyoti Sahi



Receive your gift

Jyoti Sahi



Praise to you, the life.

Jyoti Sahi



The Holy Family.

Jyoti Sahi



imprint of the figure of Christ, especially of the facial expression on the shroud in which he was buried, has influenced the facial depiction of Christ since the sixth century when the shroud was kept at Edessa (now Urga in Turkey). This shroud, now preserved at Turin, Italy, is known as the shroud of Turin. Since the twelfth century, through the influence of the order of St. Francis of Assisi, the human Christ, the innocence of the child and the agony of the passion came to the foreground in viewing Christ. The renaissance showed Christ as the ideal human being which then resulted, in the Baroque period, in presenting his death, resurrection and ascension in his eternal glory. Later representations of Christ in the West fail often in cultural quality. The nineteenth century, right into the twentieth century, shows a Christ figure which is both shallow and soft, which is Kitsch. The word Kitsch is said to come from the English word 'keech' meaning a lump of congealed fat. Kitsch then means expressions of art which are sham, showy, sentimental and lack genuineness. In this sense any plastic imitation of a true piece of art is Kitsch.

At the root of the crisis of modern religious painting in the West are several causes. Since the Enlightenment (late eighteenth century) Christian faith began to be questioned. Artists had to come to grips with the feeling of the meaninglessness of life put forward by many. In the process of secularisation art lost its great patron, the Church; it had to look out for new themes and new patrons.

A tension arose between the claim of freedom to experiment and express and the need to communicate to a given group of people. The breakdown of a cultural identity based on recognised forms of expression, of a common cultural language, of symbols understood and accepted by a whole community, now stood in the way of communicating to the larger community. Artists expressed themselves in new '-isma' and still newer and later ones. If primacy was given to the creativity of the artist, his freedom of expression without reference to a common language of art and art was not commissioned for a particular service within a community, the content mattered little compared with form and expression. All this had its repercussions on the relationship between modern art and religion. A religion is more than a general sense of religiosity, so also a visual presentation to be recognised by a religious group will have to communicate through more commonly established expressions.



In our times, as far as the West is concerned, much of the cultural expressions did not originate from religious sources; this made it still more difficult to relate the new cultural expressions to the great mass of religious people or to be admitted into places of worship. This resulted in a deep division between many new creative forms of art growing out of the free impulse of artists and religious paintings springing out of devotion, insight and the service of the faithful. These religious pictures followed known forms of expression which were dated, and hence resulted in a harmless and plastic art.

Just when one began to speak of the end of the Christ presentation in art, in an astonishing way, artists felt again drawn to him. Already in the early nineteenth century, one finds nature representations with religious connotations of the highest quality; for example, the paintings of Caspar David Friedrich. Guenther Rombold and Horst Schwebel state, "It is astonishing how many painters and sculptors in our century have dealt with this theme, i.e. the Christ theme". (G. Rombold and H. Schwebel, *Christus in der Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts*, p. 156). The aspects under which this happened were many: to show the redeeming power of the message of Christ, to depict the human condition of rejection and suffering in interaction with Christ's condition, to serve as a critique of society and religion. Some of the abstract presentations especially show a meditative context. In the latter one finds influences from the Far East. (See *ibid.*, p. 9-10).

One can recognize that the painting of Christian themes in India is in tune with what is done in the West where the Christ picture has returned with strength and force in the twentieth century. Indian artists were not unaffected by what developed in the West, considering the persistent influence of Western developments in art on art schools in India and on individual artists. But the turning to the Christ theme primarily did not come from this cultural influence of the West but arose out of the momentum of the Indian renaissance itself. The most persistent common idea within this renaissance is the one of humanism, of a human concern. It was the humaneness of Christ, "becoming one of us excluding sin", his relevance for man in his most vital concerns, which made him a subject for the artist in India. He is seen as a critique of society. By choosing this theme, artists have contributed to the creative en-

counter between persons of different religions. As this encounter in the field of art grew out of the flowering of the Indian renaissance which itself was born out of the meeting with the West and Christianity, the encounter of the artist was preceeded by a wider intellectual confrontation and has helped the ongoing dialogue between religions and cultures.

The modern non-Christian artists will also stress the freedom modern art gives to the individual to express himself/herself, not constrained by the traditionally accepted language of common signs and symbols. For many of them art is not meant to serve a specific religious or moral ideology. The artist may meet therefore only partially the expectations of a religious group. This is seen from the practically total absence of modern paintings from Hindu places of worship. Non-Christian artists painting Christian themes may meet only partially the understanding of Christian groups. However the possibility of communicating between persons of different religions is larger than one may expect. This is due to the inner affinity of spiritual seekers of different religions. Besides specific religious ideas have had their influence across religious divisions. Christian ideas which have influenced the Indian renaissance have been given expression in colour and form through non-Christian artists.

Most of the Indian Christian artists are persons committed to their Christian faith. They will use therefore Christian themes not only as expressions of religiosity in general or as a medium to highlight aspects of our human condition, however valuable this may be, but to give expression to their faith. They have the advantage that they are able to communicate to a large community of people all over the world, who share with them their deepest religious convictions and the understanding of common symbols. This explains why Christian artists in India through recognized symbols can address themselves to Christians in India as well as to persons of their own faith all over the world. In a time when it is taken for granted by many that art should express itself through a variety of cultural media, artists who express their faith through the medium of their own culture, will find encouragement rather than criticism from people of their own faith but from other cultures and continents. The Christian of today does not want uniformity all over the world but rather pluriformity of expressing the same basic faith content. The Christian artist is expected to express his own religious conviction.



tion through his own cultural medium without watering down the depth of his insight. What is expected from him is to be thoroughly Indian and in being so he should be able to express his faith conviction.

The way to international recognition for the Indian Christian artist has not been via the general public or artists' association or museums in India or abroad, but via church related groups. This is due to a similarity of concern between artists and groups, and one should not underestimate the largeness of such audiences. As regards publicity they will be overtaken in representation only by the general media of mass communication. The sameness of concern between the artist and his congenial religious group refers to a common religious perception; it does not exclude but encourages rather that the artist is deeply rooted in his own cultural context and that he is recognized within his own culture.

The Indian Christian artist is expected therefore to be so talented that he is taken note of by the artists' community of his country. Indian Christian artists, on the whole, are not much known in the larger artists' circles of the country; they deserve more recognition than what they get. In India they have not the recognized eminence Christian artists have in Japan. Indian Christian artists should be able to communicate with their own religious community and to make it possible for members of their community to purchase their works, being within their means. The majority of the Christian people are adverse to more forward forms of art and are satisfied with mediocre, popular expressions of art. This they share with most people in the country, where the so-called calendar art, not without its merits, but being at the level of filmy songs and gaudy bill-boards, is the most visible and accepted form of art.

The Christian artist is supposed to be above this level of art yet not so far above that he cannot be appreciated any more by a larger group of people. His pictures, finally, are not meant for art-galleries only, but for churches, institutions and homes.

Mass media and modern communication systems prepare the way for a new international language, also in art, which has been characterized by 'imitation, uniformity and inter-changeability'. All artists in India and Indian Christian artists too are asked precisely to show what is genuine, different and non-interchangeable in order to



contribute something of their own specific cultural and religious background. This contribution will not exhaust itself in externals, but will have to express the inner genius and creative force of the specific Indian tradition with its multiplicity of religions which does not allow the loss of its own specific identity in a common universal expression.

Indian Christian painting by Christian artists in modern times extends just over half a century. The time has passed when one would question the right of expressing Christian themes through Indian cultural media. When an artist gives visible expression to his Christian experience he does what others have been doing within their own cultures through the centuries and throughout the world. As far as India is concerned it is not anymore the question to turn to traditional models, be they Ajanta, Moghul miniatures or others. The various artists have grown as the years passed on and found out their own individual mature styles.

As recent exhibitions have shown, Christian themes are being depicted through the various forms, symbols, techniques and approaches which modern painting offers. Indian art has absorbed many influences, indigenous as well as those from other cultural origins, traditional and modern. All this will not do away with the need for a specific Indian contribution, so that in a variety of forms mankind expresses a rich harvest of creativity.

It is the ideal that religion and art be not separated but meet in a creative endeavour. It is a hopeful sign that a church in Dadar, Bombay, has been designed by the well-known architect, Charles Correa and that the commission for the painting of the ceiling was given to the outstanding painter, M.F. Husain. Charles Correa is a Catholic and M.F. Husain is a Muslim.

We started with the legend of St. Thomas, the Apostle, who built up treasures in heaven by helping the poor, neglecting to build palaces on earth. There is no question about the need of helping those who are poor and deprived. May the Indian artist accept the challenge, that he bring about beauty and more satisfaction to all, and especially to the poor, so that their homes here become more beautiful—which should make it easier for them to reach their eternal destiny!



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"As a result of his long experience of the use of art by Christians, especially in India, Fr. Lederle stresses the importance of the 'devotional' aspect of images. In this sense he complements Dr. Masao Takenaka's approach which has been to stress that Asian images of Jesus and His message are a theological statement, as valid as any verbal or written statement. One senses, reading the essays of Fr. Lederle, that for him art is emotive: it is not so much a visual exegesis but a Faith-response, comparable to Bhakti-devotion in the Hindu tradition. Thus he sees art as a sadhana, that is, a spiritual quest, both for the artist and for those who use the image meditatively as a way to God.

"These papers on 'Christian Painting in India through the Centuries' will be an important contribution to the now growing body of literature on this subject, coming, as these reflections do, from a person who devoted much concern to the enriching of Christian culture in the Indian Church of today."

—From the Foreword

by Jyoti Sahi





#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**MATTHEW LEDERLE** was born on 13 March 1926 at Schönbach, West Germany, and was educated chiefly at Memmingen. Though from a known anti-Nazi family, he had to do compulsory military service in the German army during World War II, and after graduation from the military academy at Oschatz he was assigned to the 27th Paratrooper Regiment. At the end of the war he was in Berlin, and escaped twice from military prison camps.

In 1949 Matthew Lederle joined the Society of Jesus. Two years later he came to India, and after theological studies was ordained in Pune on 24 March 1957. He also obtained the Ph. D. of the University of Poona for his thesis on "Philosophical Trends in Modern Maharashtra". He became an Indian citizen in 1965.

Fr. Lederle was first assigned to work in rural areas, but spent practically all his priestly life in the city of Pune, in the pursuit of inter-religious dialogue and inculturation, based at the Snehasadan Institute for the Study of Religion, which he founded. At the same time he was a keen promoter of Indian Christian Art, through personal encouragement, and through Art India, a publication centre.

On 21 June 1985 Fr. Lederle became Provincial of the Goa-Poona Jesuit Province. Almost exactly a year later, on 8 June 1986, he died at Calangute, Goa, as the result of a heart attack while swimming.